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# THE CONCEPT OF MORTAL SIN IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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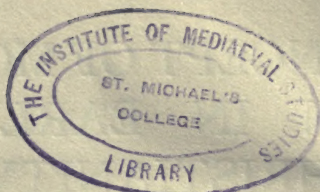
## DISSERTATION

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## INTRODUCTION.

Moral Theology enumerates among its sources the writings of the Fathers. The present study is an attempt to gather from the earliest documents of this source the texts that have reference to the concept of mortal sin, and to determine the value of such passages for the fundamental notion of grievous transgression. The period from which these documents are taken extends well into the first half of the third century.

The expression "Concept of Mortal Sin" is used in this dissertation in its broader sense, comprehending not only the nature, the extent, the required conditions of grievous sin, and chiefly its contra-distinction to venial sin, but also the practical application of the concept to the various kinds of violation of moral precepts. The theoretical concept, therefore, and the practical, come into consideration. By "mortal sin" is understood personal mortal sin, not original sin.

As with other theological concepts, we do not expect to find a formal definition at so early a period as the first and second centuries. It is only in the second half of the second century that we find the defense of Christian morality assigning a gradually more discernible outline to the concepts in question.

The dogmatico-historical discussion on penance and confession in primitive Christianity is not treated *ex professo*; sufficiently important points of contact of the present investigation with the discussion mentioned will be indicated in the course of the First Part. We refrain from referring to the discussion in the Second Part. The subject becomes quite complicated in Tertullian's works and would lead far beyond the scope of our present study. We have found nothing in his writings that could be construed as conclusive against the milder view of Pesch, Esser, Stufler, D'Alès, "and Catholic theologians generally."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rauschen, "Eucharist and Penance," p. 153 sqq. Eng. transl. of 2nd Germ. ed., St. Louis, 1913.

The First Part of the book deals with the Pre-Tertullianic documents. They treat extensively of moral topics, especially so the *Didache* and the *Pastor Hermae*, but their contribution to the concepts of mortal sin and its various aspects is, at least at the present stage of investigation of early patristic writings, proportionately small in comparison with that of the works of Tertullian, though it is by no means a negligible quantity. Hence the apparently disproportionate consideration given to the Pre-Tertullianic and to the Tertullianic documents.

The Second Part is devoted exclusively to the study of Tertullian. The writings of the Pre-Tertullianic period may be considered in a justifiable sense as merely preliminarily constructive of his orthodox theology. Tixeront claims that Tertullian deserves pre-eminently the title of Founder of Theology in the West.<sup>2</sup> Bardenhewer, while valuating the influence of Tertullian on later theology (in the Occident) as practically unimportant, admits the thorough and comprehensive grasp that the great Apologist had of Orthodox doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

His views on morality—with due allowance of course for his rigoristic attitude both during and after his Catholic period—are as to their importance in determining the early Christian concept of mortal sin in proportion to the preeminence and thorough grasp of his mind. It is to be expected that a matter of so vast practical import as the distinction between mortal and venial sin should find appropriate allocation in Tertullian's treatment of moral questions. An unbiased investigation of his works will fully meet this expectation.

<sup>2</sup> "History of Dogmas," Vol. I, p. 304, St. Louis, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Bardenhewer, "Geschichte der Altkirchlichen Literatur, Vol. II, p. 386, Freiburg, i. Br. 1914: So tief und wahr nun auch Tertullian manche Momente der Glaubensueberlieferung erfasst, so scharf und klar er insbesondere die Bedingungen und Gesetze alles theologischen Forschens ausgesprochen hat, auf die spaetere Theologie des Abendlandes—und das Morgenland kommt ueberhaupt nicht in Betracht—hat er nur verschwindend geringen Einfluss erlangt. Er ist nun einmal kein Mann der Kirche gewesen.—Op. cit., p. 389: Augustinus konnte die Anschauungen seines alten Landsmannes einlaesslicher rechtfertigen und hie und da auch schaefer fassen; aber zu aendern brauchte er dieselben nicht.



If in several places we cover well-known territory in Tertullianic lore we do so with the express purpose of shaping results and views of others for the particular aim of this study.

The investigation is based on the texts of Migne, Funk, Oehler, de Labriolle, Reifferscheid-Wissowa, for the respective documents. Other collections or editions will be noted in the remarks. The English translation of the passages quoted is taken, as a rule, from the Ante-Nicene Fathers.

The patristic documents are to be considered in their chronological order—unless otherwise indicated—the certain or most probable date of their appearance, as given by Bardenhewer, Funk, or D'Alès, being the guiding rule in placing them in their proper sequence.

The authors and the documents are to be considered separately since the nature and purpose of this study obviously demands the method of separate investigation for the sake of thoroughness and convenient presentation.

## ABBREVIATIONS.

*Kgau.*—*Kirchengeschichtliche Abhandlungen und Untersuchungen.*

*Pa.*—*Patres Apostolici.*

*Tq.*—*Theologische Quartalschrift.*

*Zkt.*—*Zeitschrift fuer katholische Theologie.*

*Tu.*—*Texte und Untersuchungen.*

*Anf.*—*Ante-Nicene Fathers.*

## (TERTULLIAN'S WRITINGS)

*Nat.*—*ad Nationes.* *Apol.*—*Apologeticum.* *Test Anim.* *De testimonio animae.* *Spect.*—*De spectaculis.* *Adv. Marc.*—*Adversus Marcionem.* *Praesc. Haer.*—*De praescriptione haereticorum.* *Orat.* *De oratione.* *Bapt.*—*De baptismo.* *Pat.*—*De patientia.* *Paen.*—*De paenitentia.* *Cult. Fem.*—*De cultu feminarum.* *Ux.*—*ad Uxorem.* *Herm.*—*Adversus Hermogenem.* *Jud.*—*Adversus Judaeos.* *Virg. Vel.*—*De virginibus velandis.* *Pall.*—*De pallio.* *Val.*—*Adversus Valentinianos.* *Anim.*—*De anima.* *Carn. Christi.*—*De carne Christi.* *Res. Carn.* *De resurrectione carnis.* *Exh. Cast.*—*De exhortatione castitatis.* *Cor.*—*De corona.* *Scorp.*—*Scorpiace.* *Idol.*—*De idololatria.* *Scap.*—*Ad Scapulam.* *Fug. in Pers.*—*De fuga in persecutione.* *Prax.*—*Adversus Praxeam.* *Monog.*—*De Monogamia.* *Jej.*—*De jejunio.* *Pud.*—*De Pudicitia.*



## FIRST PART

Authors and Documents of the Pre-Tertullianic Period.





## CHAPTER I.

### THE TEACHING OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

The first extra-canonical compendium of Christian Morality<sup>1</sup> is the *Didache* (between 80 and 100 A. D.). The document presents a practical catechetical<sup>2</sup> concept of grievous sin in a manner that, no doubt, made the matter of instruction intelligible to the illiterate convert to Christianity and still appealed in its logical simplicity to the better educated who had found their way into the Faith of Christ. The Scripture-like clearness and directness with which moral laws, counsels of perfection, and ecclesiastical regulations are placed before us is not a negligible consideration in assigning the document to the Apostolic Period.

In the first sentence of the opening chapter our minds are prepared for the understanding of grievous moral transgression. "There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but there is a great difference between these two ways."<sup>3</sup> The "great difference" is shown in the contrast between the positive and the negative precepts (chapters I-IV) on the one hand and the list of transgressions (chap. V) on the other.

The precepts of the first chapter, taken mostly word for word from Scripture, do not demand our attention so much in this study as do the commandments, mostly negative, of the second chapter. These are to a great extent of Scriptural origin, also. Murder, various sins of the flesh, theft, magic, witchcraft, infanticide, abortion, mentioned in the order given, are followed by cove-

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, "Tu." II, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Holtzmann, "Die Katechese der alten Kirche," p. 100. Cf. Schlecht, "Doctrina XII Apostolorum," p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> "Did." I, 1. The very adaptable concept of "ways" occurs frequently in Sacred Scripture e. g., the way of the Lord, the ways of men. The ways of life and death are mentioned in "Jer." 21, 8. Cf. "Baruch 4, 1," "Prov." 12:28., "Matt." 7, 13:14. "Pa." p. 3.—Taylor's Iselin's and Harnack's views of the "two ways" are treated extensively in "Kgau," II, p. 137, ss.

tousness, swearing, false witnessing, evil speech, and other sins that are less grievous than the preceding. To the difference in degree of grievousness no special clause of the chapter calls our attention, but the order in which the sins are mentioned seems a fair criterion for judging the relative amount of guilt.

The criterion of sequence should not be urged to the minutest detail. Theft and magic, for instance, are mentioned after murder but before poisoning, infanticide, and abortion, whereas they should quite naturally be classed after the latter group. There is no textual solution of this apparent discrepancy of sequence. It is most probable that the group of magic, witchcraft,<sup>4</sup> infanticide, and abortion was added here to the enumeration of the fifth, sixth, and the seventh commandments without any further purpose than that of comprehensiveness. The mention of pederasty and fornication immediately after adultery seems to put special stress on the prohibition of pederasty because of its prevalence, and of fornication because of the quite common error among the gentiles concerning the illicitness of this vice.<sup>5</sup>

The commandment of *Exodus* XX:17, not given in its Scriptural sequence, serves as an elucidation to the seventh commandment with various directly or indirectly connected species of sin: perjury, false witnessing, evil speech,<sup>6</sup> mindfulness of injuries and duplicity in mind and in speech.

There seems to be no doubt that the sins thus far mentioned are considered grievous transgressions of the moral law since the last mentioned, duplicity of tongue, while evidently a sin less grievous than perjury, is nevertheless described as a "snare of death".<sup>7</sup> Duplicity is the only sin in the second chapter to which the reason

4 *φαρμακείαις* signifies the magic arts: poisoning and incantation. Thus Funk, "Pa." in loc. p. 8.

5 "Cursus Scripturae Sacrae." "Comment. in I Cor., p. 147. Cornely, Paris, 1890.

6 Cf. "Matth." 5:22.

7 "Prov." 14, 27, also 21, 6. Duplicity of speech and a pari of mind means apparently a deceitful, hypocritical character.



of its grievousness is added—as if to do away with a possible doubt concerning the amount of guilt attached to a transgression so far down on the list of sins. We may conclude with some probability that the sin of mendacity,<sup>8</sup> belonging to a different category and forbidden in a clause separate from that containing the condemnation of duplicity, is not of a grave nature, especially since it is logically and grammatically connected with “vain and empty speech,”<sup>9</sup> sins of a weak character. A brief recapitulation, in a varied form, of the sins mentioned, with a few words concerning hatred and love and prayer conclude the second chapter.

From the preceding remarks we gather that in the list of transgressions under consideration there seems to be a line drawn between the sins of chapter II verses 1 to 4 and the *sermo mendax et inanis* of verse 5. The textual evidence, therefore, seems to imply a distinction between transgression of a grave nature, the last of which is positively accentuated as a snare of death, and the faults of a light nature, or faults of a weak character.

The supposition of a distinction between grievous and non-grievous sins in the important enumeration of the second chapter is well supported by the fact that duplicity is mentioned among the sins of the *via mortis* (chapter V), whereas mendacity,<sup>10</sup> as such, is not. True, the *amatores mendacii* are among the persons travelling in the *via mortis*, but the qualifying word *amatores*, the preceding expression *osores veritatis*, and, in general, the concomitant transgressions, sufficiently show that in chapter V we are dealing with sins of a serious nature.

The sources of murder, fornication, adultery, idolatry, theft, and blasphemy are enumerated in chapter III. Anger is mentioned as the source of murder, but it is not given as a grievous sin in chapter V. Concupiscence,<sup>11</sup> however, the source of the sins of the flesh, is listed as

8 “Did.” II, 5.

9 “Ibid.” II, 5.

10 Cf. Noldin, “Summa Theol. Moral.” II. Innsbruck, 11th ed., 1914, p. 650.

11 In the sense of evil desire, “Matth.” 5:28.

belonging to the *via mortis*. The various kinds of magic, leading to idolatry, have their place under the generic term *magiae* in Chapter V. The nature of lying, given in III, 6 as one of the sources of theft has been sufficiently dwelt upon in the preceding paragraph. The fact that it is treated as the source of a serious wrong, that is, of theft, does not argue against the statement that it is of a non-grievous nature, since anger, contextually shown to be a non-grievous sin, is likewise the source of a grievous transgression, that is, of murder.

Blasphemy originates with murmuring,<sup>12</sup> that is, most probably, a dissatisfaction with the Church or its laws. This source does not seem to be specifically or even generally listed in the *via mortis* chapter, and, therefore, may be considered a minor fault. The immediate context supports the conclusion that murmuring can well be classified as a lack of meekness or as a mild form of insolence.

The canon of contextual comparison brings out the fact that the Didache distinguishes with consistency along plainly discernible lines between faults of a grave nature and faults of a light nature. *Sermo mendax* is distinguished from the *sermo* of the *osores veritatis* and the *amatores mendacii*; proneness to anger and murmuring are distinguished from the sins of those, *a quibus longe abest mansuetudo et patientia*.<sup>13</sup> The concept of mortal sin in its practical application and in its extent was apparently not a vague and unsettled matter.

The conclusion of the fourth chapter contains the much discussed confessions of sins.<sup>14</sup> It is not the purpose of the present dissertation to enter upon the question as to what is precisely meant here by confession, what sins are to be confessed, and what the *conscientia*

<sup>12</sup> "Did." III:6. γόγγυσος. Cf. "Concordance to the Greek Testament." Molton and Geden.

<sup>13</sup> "Did." V.2.

<sup>14</sup> "Die Sündenvergebung in der Didache." Weisz in "Tq.," 1915, p. 113 ss.



*mala*<sup>15</sup> comprehends. But from the brief consideration we have thus far given to the wording of the Didache we may conclude that the method of expression used in the last few lines of chapter IV concerning confession in *ecclesia* need not be subjected to textual reconstruction.

The fifth chapter of the Didache is of importance for the present investigation in so far as it contributes more definite elements to the concept of grievous sin.

The nature of grievous transgression is described at the outset as "full of curse".<sup>16</sup> This description removes the doubt that could arise from a one-sided interpretation of the term *via mortis*. For *via mortis* could be explained in the sense of a way leading to death ultimately without implying the existing serious state of those who are travelling thereon.

Then follows the long list<sup>17</sup> of mortal sins, sins "full of curse", forty-one in number. Although many of the sins are mentioned in the plural, we would not be justified in concluding that therefore frequently repeated acts, or better said, the state of sinfulness resulting from such acts, is alone considered grievous. The term "full of curse" comprehends apparently the individual act. Sins of deed, of word (e. g. *turpiloquium*, *falsa testimonia*) and of thought (e. g., *concupiscentia*, *invidia*) are on the list. Not only sinful acts, but also sinful dispositions receive due consideration.

Murder and sins of the flesh, theft and idolatry lead the list. False witnessing, deceit, pride, avarice, filthy talking and a few other vices complete the first division, all the sins of which are given in the form of the noun-name of the sin.

In the second division of the list we find the sinful acts of those who are travelling on the way of death. The sins are mentioned in the noun-name or its equivalent denoting the person of sinners. "Persecutors of the

<sup>15</sup> "Did." IV:14.

<sup>16</sup> "Did." V:1.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. "The Irish Theol. Quarterly," p. 23, Jan., 1917. "The Didache" by the Rev. J. J. McNamee.

good," "persons hating truth", "loving a lie", "those who love vain things," are examples of the method in which the list of sins in the second division is written. Social sins receive a good share of attention. Persons who do not recognize the reward of justice, who have no pity for the poor man, who labor not for the down-trodden, who turn away the needy, who oppress the afflicted, then the advocates of the rich, the unjust judges of the poor,—all these are on the way that is cursed. Abortionists and infanticides are also mentioned.

The field of grievous sins is quite well covered by the long list of the chapter just considered. The words of the *Didache* are addressed to adults only, since obedience of children towards their parents is nowhere mentioned. Servants or slaves are told to obey their masters in chapter IV, 10, which verse, incidentally, furnishes matter for reflection on the equality of all men before God.

No mention is made in this list of those who neglect to fulfill certain counsels which at first sight seem to be precepts, for instance: "If one impress thee for one mile, go with him two" or, "If one take away thy cloak, give him also they coat."<sup>18</sup> The following passage offers a plausible solution: "If thou art able to bear all the yoke of the Lord, thou wilt be perfect; but if thou art not able, what thou art able that do".<sup>19</sup>

The quotation concerning the irremissible sin<sup>20</sup> presents the same difficulty as Matt. 12:21: "Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but the blasphemy of the spirit shall not be forgiven."<sup>21</sup> That the irremissible sin refers most probably to a continued disposition, or state, of moral obduracy as exemplified in the Pharisees and the Scribes, whom the context shows to be guilty of that sin, we may deduce from the fact that Mark qualifies the sin as an eternal one. The *Didache* gives this Scriptural view no new version, hence the concept of

<sup>18</sup> "Did." I:4. of Scriptural origin. Cf. "Matth." 5:40-41.

<sup>19</sup> "Did." VI:2. Funk "Pa." in loc. refers "jugum" to "Did." I:3-6. However, "do what thou art able" would be ill applied to "love of enemy."

<sup>20</sup> "Did." XI:7.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also "Mk." 3:28-29. "Lk." 12:10. (I "John" 5:16?)

mortal sin is not qualified by the supposedly new element of irremissibility.

Enemies must be reconciled before the eucharistic sacrifice takes place.<sup>22</sup> That there is question here of serious sin against charity cannot be demonstrated.<sup>23</sup> "That your sacrifice be not profaned" can easily be interpreted to exclude all faults against charity, especially since the divine service was considered a "love feast".

One more passage of the Didache is, perhaps, of some value for our present study. "To everyone that acts amiss against another, let no one speak, nor let him hear ought from you until he repent."<sup>24</sup> The expression "acts amiss" has apparently the meaning of erring in faith, swerving from the truth.<sup>25</sup> It is most likely a question of the sin of heresy, which would entail excommunication for the guilty one. Funk seems to interpret the passage in connection with the preceding words: "Reprove one another not in anger, but in peace, as you have it in the Gospel". He considers avoiding the delinquent as the last means of bringing such a brother to the realization of his transgression. The context, however, and the Scriptural use of ἀστοχέω apparently do not warrant Funk's interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

The general impression that we gain from the Didache as to the concept of grievous sin is that of a precision which we would not expect in so early a writing. The distinction between the degrees of guilt, the long and exact list of mortal sins, the unmistakable characterization of the sins on this list as the "way of death", "full of curse", the consistency, brevity and clearness with which the sins are placed before us—all this deserves indeed the praise bestowed on the Didache by one of the foremost modern non-Catholic scholars of Christian antiquity, when in speaking of its arrangement and contents he says that "it attains its purpose completely", part of which purpose is to sum up "in the form of a compendium the moral precepts of the Gospel".<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "Did." XIV. 2. Cf. "Matth." 5:23-24.

<sup>23</sup> "Cum amico suo."

<sup>24</sup> "Did." XV:3.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. I "Tim." 6:6-21; II "Tim." 2:18.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Funk "Pa." in loc., p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> A. Harnack, "Tu." II, p. 37.



## CHAPTER II.

## ST. BARNABAS AND ST. CLEMENT OF ROME.

The date of this epistle of St. Barnabas is a matter of conjecture. It is generally accepted that the letter was not written before 70 nor after 137. Funk is of the opinion that it appeared during the reign of Nerva 96-98 or shortly after.<sup>1</sup> Barnabas is most probably not the author of the epistle, but it had been so generally attributed to him that it still retains his name. At all events, it reflects some views of the Christians in the half-century following the destruction of Jerusalem, and in so far its texts pertaining to grievous sin can be of value for the present study.

The effect which grievous sin has on the soul is well stated in the opening chapter of the Epistle. The author obviously took pains to impress his views on his readers.<sup>2</sup> The quotation from Zach. 8:17,<sup>3</sup> is soon followed by the admonition to be very careful concerning salvation "lest the evil one having made his entrance by deceit, should hurl us forth from life".<sup>4</sup> That by "life" the author has reference to the very essence of salvation is quite apparent from the immediate context<sup>5</sup> and from the first chapter, in which "the hope of life" is described as the beginning and the end of our faith. Evil thoughts, therefore, in the sense of hatred and of false oaths as the external means of satisfying that hatred are branded as grievous. The nature of this grievousness is best shown by its result, namely, the privation of "the hope of life", which may be easily understood by infer-

1 "Kgau," II, p. 77 ss.

2 "Epist. Barn." I passim, II:9, 10.

3 "Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his friend; and love not a false oath."

4 II:10.

5 Care concerning our salvation.

ence from Titus I; 2, III; 7, to be the privation of sanctifying grace.<sup>6</sup>

The element of human frailty in trying to fulfill the commandments of God is taken into account by the Epistle as much as it is by the Didache.<sup>7</sup> The readers are advised to do what lies in their power to avoid sin.

"As much as in us lies, let us meditate upon the fear of God, and let us keep his commandments, that we may rejoice in his justifications."<sup>8</sup> And a few sentences further on we read: "Take heed lest resting at our ease... we should fall asleep in our sins, and the wicked prince, acquiring power over us should thrust us away from the kingdom of the Lord."<sup>9</sup> These few passages do not permit us to share the conviction of those who lay so much stress on the perfect life of the early Christian as to exclude reconciliatory penance.

The justice of punishment for sin is based on the knowledge that the sinner has of the way of righteousness. "That man perishes justly, who, having a knowledge of the way of righteousness, rushes off into the way of darkness".<sup>10</sup> This is the first explicit mention in the early writings of moral cognition as a prerequisite to the imputability of grievous transgression. The functioning of the will is not mentioned in so explicit terms, but we may easily deduce from the term *ἑαυτὸν ἀποσυνέχει* that the consent is of as much importance as knowledge.

Several grievous transgressions are considered in allegorical explanations<sup>11</sup> of the Mosaic law concerning the prohibition of certain kinds of food,<sup>12</sup> but they do not

6 "Titus" 3:7: "That, being justified by His grace, we may be heirs, according to hope of life everlasting."

7 "Did." VI:2, 3; XIV:1, 2; XV:3.

8 "Epist. Barn." IV:11.

9 IV:13.

10 V:4. Funk interprets "rushing off into the way of darkness" as conversion to the Jewish ceremonies. The "way of darkness" of chapters XVIII and XX does not support Funk's view. Moreover, *ἑαυτὸν ἀποσυνέχει* has most probably the meaning of letting one's self go completely in the face of temptation (*retia*).

11 X.

12 "Lev." 11; "Deut." 14.

claim our attention as much as chapters XVIII, XIX and XX. These are quite similar to the first five chapters of the Didache.

As in the Didache, the figure of the two ways is chosen to impart more strikingly the teaching of morality. While the Didache calls one way that of life and the other that of death, the Epistle changes the names but not the substance of the concept. "The way of light" and "the way of darkness" are the title descriptions used by the author of the Epistle.

In chapter XIX "the way of light" adds the commandment, not found in the Didache, forbidding the profane use of God's name.

The way of darkness receives an additional description in the Epistle, which is quite explicit. It is described as being "full of cursing", as the way of eternal death with punishment, on which way are the transgressions that cause the soul of man to be lost.<sup>13</sup> No doubt is left in the mind of the reader that the sins in the list of chapter XX are deadly. The order of sequence is different from that of the Didache, but the sins mentioned are practically the same.

The Epistle has added some new elements to the concept of mortal sin. Knowledge and consent as prerequisites, human frailty as a mitigating circumstance, the privation of the *spes vitae* and eternal death with punishment as the effects of serious transgressions are results sufficiently well supported by a study of the text. Whatever the "lack of literary ability" in the author of the Barnabas document may have been, so much must be said in his favor, that he had a view of mortal sin which as to correctness of concept would do ample justice to our demands from later writers on morality.

#### A. *First letter of Clement to the Corinthians.*

The Barnabas document was written—probably—for the converts from Judaism and Paganism who lived in



the vicinity of Alexandria. The letters of Clement were addressed to the Christians at Corinth. The Didache is of the nature of an encyclical, the Barnabas and Clementine letters have a more restricted character.

The first Clementine document was written about the end of the first century by Clement I.<sup>14</sup>

In the praise bestowed<sup>15</sup> on the Corinthians for their faith and virtue before schism had torn their ranks we meet with a difficulty concerning the concept of sin. The expression "involuntary transgressions"<sup>16</sup> is used, which would imply that the faithful and virtuous Corinthians and, perhaps, Clement himself, had a wrong view of the conditions required for imputability of sin. To ask pardon for involuntary transgressions is an inconsistency which we would not impute to the author of this thorough document.

If we remember, however, that the chapter in which this term occurs is a eulogy on the well ordered life of the faithful at Corinth, and if we consider that the immediate context speaks of their insatiable desire of doing good to such an extent that they besought God to be merciful to them for merely material transgressions, the difficulty loses its force. It was, therefore, not a distorted, exaggerated view of sin which the Corinthians had, but rather an extreme willingness to do penance. The expression, when correctly adjusted, created the strong presumption that the nature of sin was well understood.

The sin of envy with its long train of consequences is considered at length in several chapters<sup>17</sup> in a manner that leaves no doubt as to its grievousness. The Corinthians, who have failed in their duty and have been in-

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bardenhewer, "Patrologie," p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> I "Clem. ad Cor." I, II.

<sup>16</sup> Ἀκούτες. The Latin version ignorantes would merely shift the difficulty, while the Syriac version ἐχόντες (willing, purposely) would solve the immediate textual difficulty, but render the context a literary contradiction. Ἀκούτες would, therefore, seem the preferable reading.

<sup>17</sup> III-VI.

volved in "envy, strife and vain labors" are exhorted to return to the "glorious and venerable rule of their tradition". The exhortation constitutes the contents or motive of a considerable part of the latter. Sedition, pride, envy and other closely related sins should be laid aside, and recourse be had to "God's compassions".<sup>18</sup> No sign of rigorism is found in Clement's dealings with the unruly Church of Corinth. One of the first texts quoted to prove the possibility of repentance is from Isaiah 1:18: "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow, and if they be as red as crimson, they shall be as white as wool." There are numerous other references to God's mercy.<sup>19</sup> In connection herewith the following passage is of importance. "Whatever sins we have committed, seduced by a servant of Satan, let us implore the remission thereof."<sup>20</sup> The statement is general as to the persons who have sinned and as to the sins committed. In the same chapter we find that "it is better for a man that he confess his sins than that he harden his heart."<sup>21</sup> Whatever the nature of this confession, it is very improbable that rigorism concerning penance after baptism could have held sway at a time when so mild a doctrine as the one implied by the passages just quoted was expressed by the Bishop of Rome.

In this Clementine Letter we find sins of evil desire forbidden. "Let us forsake the impure desires after evil deeds that we may be protected by His mercy from the judgment to come."<sup>22</sup>

A list of sins is found in this document, also. We shall be numbered among the elect if we follow "the way of truth and cast away from us all injustice, malice, avarice, strife, evil practices and deceit, whispering and evil speaking, the hatred of God, pride, haughtiness, vainglory and inhospitality".<sup>23</sup>

18 IX:1.

19 XVI, XVIII.

20 LI:1.

21 LI:3.

22 XXVIII:1.

23 XXXV:5.

That the above listed sins are of a grievous nature is quite evident from the introductory remark concerning the necessity of avoiding the transgressions here listed in order to be numbered among the elect, and from the sentence following, which, moreover, adds an element to the concept of sin which we have not met thus far, namely, cooperation. "They who commit these (sins) are hated by God, not however, they alone, but also those who give their approval."<sup>24</sup>

In the preceding chapter<sup>25</sup> we find the vices opposed to moderation, to humility and to meekness considered as cursed by God. Other sins or vices—mainly sins of the flesh—are also condemned as grievous in the same chapter.

What we have gathered from the first Clementine document concerning the concept of sin supports with more than conjectural probability the impression that certain sins were consistently considered grievous, that the nature of grievous sin was such as to deprive the guilty person of God's friendship, but that the condition of being hated by God was not an unalterable one; moreover, that the Church's attitude towards seriously delinquent members was inferentially not that of rigorism, and that the principle of cooperation was at least elementarily recognized. As to whether this document teaches a distinction between grievous and non-grievous sin, we could not answer affirmatively with the same degree of probability with which we have asserted the preceding conclusions. The expressions in which Clement includes himself among the sinners<sup>26</sup> will not permit us on the one hand to judge him guilty of serious transgression, nor on the other to believe him free from all fault.

We would be inclined to say that the document considers the individual transgression as grievously sinful, and not merely the accumulation of violations. The use of

<sup>24</sup> XXXV:6.

<sup>25</sup> XXX.

<sup>26</sup> VII:1; LI:1.



"all injustice, all sedition", "blameless", "in every respect", seems to include reference to individual acts.

*B. The Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians.*<sup>27</sup>

This document contains little that is of importance for our present study. It is the first homily—and stress is to be put on the fact that it is a homily. No clear support is found in it for the opinion concerning extreme rigorism in primitive Christianity.

This world, which "preaches adultery, corruption, avarice, and deceit", is inimical to the next, which "renounces these sins".<sup>28</sup>

A rather rigoristic view is expressed in the words: "Unless we keep our baptism holy and undefiled, with what confidence can we enter the palace of God?"<sup>29</sup> and in the words: "Keep thy flesh chaste and thy soul undefiled, that ye may receive eternal life".<sup>30</sup> The impression of rigorism weakens, however, in view of the fact that the document is an exhortation to penance.

The following texts contain quite a limitation to the strict interpretation we would feel inclined to put on the homily. "Let us not be dragged away by worldly desires, but let us attempt to make advances in the commandments of the Lord."<sup>31</sup> And again: "Let us not, unwise as we are, be affronted and sore displeased, if someone admonishes and turns us from iniquity unto righteousness. For sometimes, while we are doing evil, we do not perceive it on account of the double-mindedness and unbelief that is in our breasts, and we are darkened in our understanding by our vain desires."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> We may accept Funk's opinion that this document—attributed to Clement, though he was most probably not the author—was written in the first half of the second century.

<sup>28</sup> II "Clem." ad Cor. VI:3, 4.

<sup>29</sup> VI:9.

<sup>30</sup> VIII:6.

<sup>31</sup> XVII:3.

<sup>32</sup> XIX:2.

## CHAPTER III.

## ST. IGNATIUS AND ST. POLYCARP.

The documentary evidence that St. Ignatius of Antioch puts forth concerning the concept of mortal sin bespeaks the mind of the Oriental Church at the beginning of the second century. A saintly and learned disciple of the apostles, he is undoubtedly an authority on their doctrine.

In the writings of St. Ignatius we have no explicit statements as to the nature of grievous transgression of divine law. But there are several texts that show quite conclusively the correct concept of grievous sin. Opposition to the will of God characterizes the sin of those who are against the accepted doctrine concerning the grace of Christ.<sup>1</sup> They neglect the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed, they have no regard for charity. There seems to be question in *Ad Smyrnaeos* VI concerning those who do not accept the doctrine of the Eucharist. The immediate context speaks of those who abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer. Those who speak against this gift of God die in their disputes. Funk takes it for granted that Ignatius is here treating of heretics.<sup>2</sup>

The argument deducible from the words of Ignatius for the remissibility of the sin of heresy has strong support in the context. In his letter to the Ephesians Ignatius speaks of the guilt of persons who corrupt the faith of God by wicked doctrines.<sup>3</sup> If the corruptors of families<sup>4</sup> have suffered death, how much more deserving thereof are corruptors of doctrine? The Trallians are told to avoid the "evil off-shoots<sup>5</sup> that produce death-bear-

1 "Ad Smyrnaeos" VI. The shorter version is used in this and the following passages.

2 "Pa." p. 281, in loc.

3 "Ad Eph." XVI:2.

4 "Ibid."

5 Heresies.

ing fruit, whereof if anyone tastes he immediately dies."<sup>6</sup> Although the passage is figurative, one cannot seriously doubt the meaning the author wanted to impart. There are few passages that convey so well the concept of spiritual death as the result of grievous offense.

Ignatius may be quoted directly to show that fallen away Christians could return to the Church. "As many as shall, in the exercise of repentance, return into the unity of the Church, these, too, shall belong to God that they may live according to Jesus Christ."<sup>7</sup>

That the sins of thought were also given consideration we may infer from the epistle to the Ephesians. "Our very secrets are near to Him. Let us, therefore, do all things as if He were dwelling in us."<sup>8</sup>

St. Polycarp of Smyrna, in his letter to the Philippians, a document of the first half of the second century, speaks of internal sin: "Nothing is hid from Him, neither reasonings nor reflections, nor anyone of the secret things of the heart."<sup>9</sup> He exhorts us to ask God, the all-seeing, not to lead us into temptation.<sup>10</sup>

In his exhortation to the presbyters the expression "bringing back the erring"<sup>11</sup> suggests the remissibility of heresy. The suggestion is confirmed by the quite general petition: "Let us return to the doctrine handed down to us from the beginning."<sup>12</sup> He asks God to grant Valens and his wife true repentance,<sup>13</sup> and he desires to have the faithful call back the straying and suffering members.<sup>14</sup>

6 "Ad Trall." XI:1.

7 "Ad Philad." III:2. This quotation does not favor Rauschen's statement. The Oriental Church about and before the year 200 affords us but two expressions in regard to grievous sins. (Dionysius of Corinth, Clement of Alexandria) Rauschen, "Eucharist and Penance," p. 183.

8 "Ad Eph." XV:3.

9 "Ad Philipp." IV:3.

10 "Ad Philipp." VII:2.

11 "Ad Philipp." VI:1.

12 "Ad Philipp." VII:2.

13 "Ad Philipp." XI:4.

14 "Ibid."



Heresy is not considered a slight matter by Polycarp, as is obvious from the words: "Whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil."<sup>15</sup>

Several passages from the *Reliquiae Presbyterorum* refer to New Testament quotations concerning sin. The reference to sinning after having the knowledge of Christ creates the impression at first reading that certain sins are irremissible. This difficulty occurs in the first fragment. "We should not be proud, nor reprehend the people of old (David and Solomon for sinning), we should rather fear that perhaps after possessing knowledge of Christ, by doing a thing displeasing to God, we no longer have remission of sins, but are excluded from His kingdom."<sup>16</sup> The word "perchance" suffices to solve the difficulty for there is no reason to construct the act of sin and its irremissibility as logically inseparable because of their grammatical unity. The "perchance" may be applied to the "remission of sins" and it would then argue equally well against the interpretation of rigorism.

Besides touching upon the remissibility of sin and the wrong of internal transgression, this chapter's study has shown that according to a disciple of the Apostles opposition to the will of God by a grievous sin—that of heresy—causes immediate spiritual death.

<sup>15</sup> "Ad Philipp." VII:1.

<sup>16</sup> "Fragment" I:11. Cf. "Hebr." 10:26.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS.

The document we are to consider in this chapter dates from the middle of the second century. It is generally accepted that the brother of Pope Pius I is its author. Irenaeus in Gall, Tertullian in North Africa, Clement in Alexandria, and the Muratori Fragment in Rome give ample proof of the wide circle of its readers.

The popular style, the ease of presentation, the naïvé of many questions put by Hermas, show that the work was primarily intended for the common people. It should, therefore, give us an insight into the concepts of the large majority of Christians, and also of the better educated class to which the writer probably belonged.<sup>1</sup>

The character of Hermas, quite consistently portrayed, suggests the conclusion that the author was a man of more than ordinary education. We are not prepared to grant that his knowledge of theology was thorough. The apparent lack of consistency in the theological views of the author should be kept in mind in judging the value of certain passages that are difficult, perhaps impossible, to interpret.

It might be appropriate to offer here a quotation from D'Alès concerning "The Shepherd of Hermas": "*Ce n'est pas un document officiel; mais c'est un document privé de très haute valeur, parce qu'il reflète avec une grande naïveté les préoccupations des pasteurs de l'Eglise romaine au deuxième siècle et les expédients de leur zèle. Également soucieux de ne jeter aucun pécheur dans le désespoir et de n'autoriser aucune présomption, ces pasteurs ne croyaient pas trahir la doctrine en la dispensant avec mesure selon les hommes et les circonstances, et parfois pratiquaient assez hardiment la restriction mentale. Telle est la raison dernière, souvent*

<sup>1</sup> The Interpretation of the Shepherd, p. 542 in "Biblical and Theological Studies."

*méconnue, de certaines particularités surprenantes que présente le langage d'Hermas.*"<sup>2</sup> The theory here proposed to harmonize the inconsistencies of Hermas would expose the "pastors of the Roman Church" to severe criticism. It is difficult to accept this theory in view of the fact that Hermas frequently inculcates simplicity and truthfulness. The criterion of comparison along general lines with the documents that immediately preceded or followed "The Shepherd" should enable us to give the views of Hermas their proper value.

Hermas speaks of the nature of serious sin in several places. The first instance is in connection with a quotation from the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>3</sup> "But that has saved you, that you did not depart from the living God."<sup>4</sup> Hermas had just been reproached because of his carelessness concerning the transgressions of his family and because of too much preoccupation with worldly matters.<sup>5</sup> The context implies that Hermas is still "salvus" because he has as yet done nothing that would separate him from God. "Evil desires after another's wife or husband deliver men over to death."<sup>6</sup> The same concept of the nature of grievous sin lies in the words: "If anyone commit this wicked deed (adultery), he works death for himself."<sup>7</sup> And again: "Among such persons (who keep the commandments) is the life of the Lord, but amongst the quarrelsome and transgressors, death."<sup>8</sup> The positive form "living unto God" occurs frequently, evidently showing by inference how deep-rooted was the thought of sin as the death of the soul.

Whether Hermas and the people his type represented had a definite concept of the distinction between great and small sins cannot be satisfactorily answered from the wording of the text. If we analyze the morality views

2 "L'Edit de Calliste," p. 112. Cf. also Zkt., 1907, p. 454.

3 "Hebr." 3:12.

4 "Vis." IIc. 3:2.

5 "Vis." IIc. 3:1.

6 "Mand." XIIc. 2.

7 "Mand." IVc. 1.

8 "Mand." VII:5.



which Hermas brings with him from the ranks of the common people, we find that he is quite astonished to learn that evil thoughts are sinful at all. The prominence that is given the correction of his wrong views on the nature of thought-sins is of more than passing significance. We can hardly doubt that the author wished to impress his readers with the malice of interior sins. There must have been a serious reason for this conspicuous and thorough correction. Hermas distinguishes between sins of thought and "perfect sins",<sup>9</sup> apparently sins of deed—after he has been corrected. But we find no sufficient evidence on which we could base a solid distinction between mortal sin and slight transgression.

Unchaste thoughts, as stated above, are to be considered sinful. The very introduction to "The Shepherd" insinuates that they are to be at least a part of the theme which the author has set himself. The anger of God is upon those who sin by unchaste thought.<sup>10</sup> The clause "*qui multiplicari et crescere fecit*" seems to indicate the ultimate reason why God is angry with such sinners. Unchaste thoughts would work untold harm to the procreation of man. Interior transgression is "indeed a great sin."<sup>11</sup> "Such as entertain wicked thoughts are bringing upon themselves death and captivity."<sup>12</sup> Although these words indicate the grievousness of sinful thoughts, they are not in full accord with a concept which we find in a later part of the work. The sin of desire and the sin of deed are there well kept distinguished. The sin of desire is called a great sin—because committed by a servant of God, but the sin of deed (adultery) is alone mentioned as deserving of death.<sup>13</sup> It is impossible to argue away the inconsistency shown by the author concerning the degree of guilt in sins of thought.

The desire of a wicked deed is called "abominable in

<sup>9</sup> "Vis." I, c. 2:1.

<sup>10</sup> "Vis." I, c. 1:6.

<sup>11</sup> "Vis." I, c. 1:8.

<sup>12</sup> "Ibid."

<sup>13</sup> "Mand." IV, c. 1:2.

a well tried spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Evil desires that “slay the servants of God” comprehend, however, not only those against chastity, the desire after “another’s wife or husband”, but also those “after extravagance and many useless dainties and drinks and many other foolish luxuries.”<sup>15</sup> The latter are obviously not so sinful as those against chastity but are still mentioned as delivering the transgressor “up to death”. It is to be regretted that no other distinction was made in the enumeration of sinful desires than that of sequence. Some stress, however, is laid on the first mentioned: “Foremost of all is the desire after another’s wife or husband.”<sup>16</sup>

Sins committed by word of mouth receive frequent mention. In his resentment at being accused of having sinned, Hermas exclaims: “When spoke I an unseemingly word to you?”<sup>17</sup> The thought that he had perhaps sinned by evil desire, did not enter his mind. His first query concerned that sin which he deemed least in the category of wrongs. That he had not been much concerned about the sinfulness of lying is quite evident from his interesting remark upon hearing how wrong falsehood should be considered by a servant of God: “I never spoke a true word in my life.”<sup>18</sup> He is warned to “keep these precepts (i. e. those that he had just received) and from this time forward” to “speak the truth at all times, if he wishes to obtain life. Falsehood is called a great wickedness and whosoever departs from it shall “live to God”.<sup>19</sup> The commandment to tell the truth at all times is quite comprehensive, and includes the prohibition of serious sins of falsehood, as is evident from other passages. Detraction is forbidden with special stress,<sup>20</sup> false witnessing and deceit are mentioned with other “evil deeds”,<sup>21</sup> such as robbery and theft.

14 “Vis.” I, c. 2:4.

15 and 16 “Mand.” XII c. 2.

17 “Vis.” I, c. 1:7.

18 “Mand.” III:3.

19 “Mand.” III:5.

20 “Mand.” II: 1, 2, 3.

21 “Mand.” VIII:5.

Carelessness in responsible positions is condemned quite forcibly. Hermas is rebuked for not having warned his family against evil and for having allowed his sons to be corrupted.<sup>22</sup>—Adultery and all sins of the flesh “that are similar to those committed by the Gentiles”<sup>23</sup> are grievously wrong for they bring death to the transgressors.<sup>24</sup>

The indwelling of the devil in anger<sup>25</sup> would not convincingly prove that serious sin is meant thereby, since the presence of the devil could be interpreted as meaning the source or beginning of temptation to do greater wrong. Theft, robbery, avarice, deceit, vainglory, hypocrisy, unlawful revelling, extravagance of riches and other sins, or vices, are mentioned as evil deeds<sup>26</sup> but in so general a manner that it is evidently not the intention of the author to give an exact or even an approximate valuation of their malice, but merely to place before the faithful some sins, from which enumeration they could easily deduce conclusions as to the attitude to be taken towards similar faults.<sup>27</sup>

The Shepherd presents a difficulty as to the remissibility of sin. The words which give rise to the difficulty are found in the Fourth Mandate. “Whosoever”, says the angel of repentance, “after that great and holy calling tempted by the devil, has fallen into sin, has one opportunity to repent. But if he sin again and repent once more his repentance will be of no avail; he will live with difficulty.”<sup>28</sup>

From this it appears all sins committed after the great and holy calling, which Clement of Alexandria interprets as meaning baptism,<sup>29</sup> are remissible, at least

22 “Vis.” I, c. 3:1.

23 “Mand.” IV, c. 1:9.

24 “Mand.” IV, c. 1:2.

25 “Mand.” V, c. 1:3.

26 “Mand.” VIII:5.

27 Other enumerations of sins are to be found in “Sim.” VIII, 6-9; “Sim.” IX, 19-23, 26.

28 “Mand.” IV, c. 3:6.

29 “Strom.” II, 13:57. Funk interprets “the great and holy calling” as meaning “time of grace,” and “one opportunity” as baptism. “Kgau,” I, p. 170.



once. Even if we accept Funk's opinion that "one opportunity" means baptism, the clause that the sinner would "live with difficulty" does not exclude all chance of remissibility, as Funk himself admits. He argues that since the angel of repentance absolutely approved of the opinion which held baptism to be the only remission of sins, it would have been a flagrant contradiction had the angel admitted another remission of sins after baptism. To Funk's mind there is no doubt about the interpretation given. Rauschen considers Funk's assumption impossible.<sup>30</sup> D'Alès would have us keep in mind, while trying to explain this difficulty, that the angel is addressing catechumens and baptized Christians. Different language had to be employed for different classes.<sup>31</sup> Stufier claims that the time granted for the second penance is to be understood relatively, that is, under the condition that the end of the world was soon to come.<sup>32</sup> This explanation would gain in plausibility, if the eschatological view expressed in the context could be shown to be of a definite nature. It is not impossible that the author was inconsistent or at least unguarded in his utterances on the doctrine of frequent remission of sin. The dogmatic utterances of the Church will not gain in strength or likelihood by a too far fetched defense of non-vital passages, as the one in question.

The general position of Stufier and his defenders on the question of frequent remission of sin through absolution granted by the Church in the early centuries seems quite favored by the texts on remissibility of grievous sin which have thus far been adduced. "If, as even some Catholic Church historians contend, the Church had for centuries refused to grant pardon to certain classes of sinners, regardless of their disposition, we should have to assume either that she was unaware of her duty to grant absolution and thus erred in an essential point of faith, or that she was inexcusably remiss

<sup>30</sup> "Eucharist and Penance," p. 156.

<sup>31</sup> "L'Édit de Calliste," p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> "Zkt.," 1907, p. 454 ss.

in the performance of her duty. Both assumptions are untenable for one who admits the divine institution of the Church."<sup>33</sup> Pohle, the only dogmatician who has thus far accepted the stricter view of some Church historians,<sup>34</sup> "would insist that the dogmatic theologian must bow before the facts of history", which facts Bartmann considers "undemonstrated as yet."<sup>35</sup>

In summing up the matter gathered for the concept of mortal sin as presented by The Shepherd we can state that the document reflects sufficiently well the second century notion of the nature of grievous sin. Non-grievous sins are apparently not treated because they do not fall within the range of the work's purpose. Sins of thought, word, and deed are explained in a popular, easily intelligible manner. The doctrine of sin in theory and in practice remains untouched by the discussion to which the inconsistency of the document on the point of remissibility of sin is subjected.

33 "Kkt.," 1907, p. 437.

34 "Lehrbuch der Dogmatik," III, p. 401.

35 "Lehrbuch der Dogmatik," p. 764.

## CHAPTER V.

## ST. JUSTIN.

The defense of the Church against Paganism, Judiasm, and the various forms of heresy by the leading apologist of the second century, brought out the views of Christian morality in strong relief. We expect a quite systematical exposition of moral wrong from the pen of a philosopher-convert to the religion that insisted not merely on a deep faith but also on the fulfillment of the precepts proposed or confirmed by that faith. We find the concept of grievous sin entering upon the period of transition from popular to technical forms of expression.

Sin is the transgression of the law with knowledge and consent. This is the brief definition we think we are justified in formulating from the words of Justin: "God, wishing men to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness, possessing reason that they may know by whom they are created and with a law, that they should be judged by Him if they do anything contrary to right reason."<sup>1</sup> Even if the text as it lies before us would permit of another version, the context of the chapter from which the above quotation is taken would force us to conclude that Justin's purpose is precisely that of giving an exact statement as to the nature of a transgression bringing on moral imputability. His exposition of the cause of guilt is in reply to the fundamental difficulty concerning the freedom of the will.

The philosopher apologist had sufficiently emphasized the elementary prerequisite of free will in other parts of the *Dialogue*. There remained apparently but one adequately satisfactory solution to the anticipated objection of the well educated Typho, and that was a clear,

<sup>1</sup> "Dial.," 141 ("Ante-Nicene Fathers," Vol. I. Migne, "Pg.," Vol. 6).



comprehensive statement of the very nature of transgression. Less explicit expressions concerning the nature of sin in one or more respects are found in other passages. Rejection by God denotes the state of the sinner after a grievous wrong: "He who commits adultery is rejected by God."<sup>2</sup> Wicked deeds, as for instance, idolatry, are compared to the fangs of the serpent.<sup>3</sup>

There is no definite line of demarcation between grievous sins and non-grievous sins, but some distinction seems to be presupposed. The venerable instructor, mentioned in the opening chapters of the *Dialogue*, who had kindled the love of Christian philosophy in the soul of Justin, probably presupposes the notion of a slight transgression of divine law. "The souls," he says, "would, after punishment, be afraid to commit even the most trivial sin."<sup>4</sup> The interpretation of this "most trivial sin" as meaning the least grievous sin would appear rather forced, especially in view of the context.

Freedom in moral choice is a concept frequently and extensively mentioned in the writings of Justin. Plato, he claims, took the concept from the works of Moses.<sup>5</sup> And again he tells us "we have learned from the prophets that punishment and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions." "Unless the human race have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions, of whatever kind they be."<sup>6</sup>

The whole chapter from which these passages are taken is a philosophical exposition of moral responsibility as based on the freedom of the will. Several other passages attest the conviction of Justin that voluntariness is "a *conditio sine qua non*" of formal sin.

Nor is free will a merely theoretical matter with Jus-

<sup>2</sup> "Apol." I, 15.

<sup>3</sup> "Dial." 94.

<sup>4</sup> "Dial." 4. The English version in "Anf.," given above, seems rather extreme. *Καὶ ἐφοβούντο ἂν καὶ τό τυχὸν ἐξαμαρτεῖν ὕστερον.*

*Ac metuerent ne quid deinceps vel leviter peccarent.* Migne, "P. G.," VI, 485, 486.

<sup>5</sup> "Apol." I:44.

<sup>6</sup> "Apol." I:43.

tin. Flemming<sup>7</sup> claims Justin has added so many practical limitations to his defense of the free will that the exercise of freedom in moral choice becomes an impossibility. Among the limitations Flemming quotes are stifled conscience and demoniacal influence. The limitations are, of course, put to the ethical actions based on the freedom of the will. "Though they all commit such practices, yet they do not escape the knowledge that they act unrighteously whenever they do so, with the exception of those who are possessed with an unclean spirit, and who have been debased by education, by wicked customs, and by sinful institutions and who have lost, or rather quenched and put under their natural ideas."<sup>8</sup> This is the passage to which Flemming refers—and a first glance will show that it is an obvious contradiction of his statement. The few and not the many are under the influence of demons, and suffering from a stifled conscience.

As we have seen in the text enumerating the essentials of mortal sin, reason, or knowledge, is considered as important as free will. It is likewise evident from other texts that moral cognition is looked upon by Justin as an obviously presupposed condition for sin. "It is in the nature of man to know good and evil."<sup>9</sup> A more practical statement of his conviction on this point is found in the following: "Every race knows that adultery and fornication and homicide and such like are sinful; and though they commit such practices, yet they do not escape from the knowledge that they act unrighteously whenever they so do."<sup>10</sup> Justin has stated in unmistakable terms the theory, that knowledge of evil is a prerequisite condition to imputability. The objection, however, has been made that, while he upholds theoretically the faculty of moral cognition, he restricts it practically

7 Flemming, "Zur Beurteilung des Christentums Justins des Martyrers," p. 14.

8 "Dial." 93.

9 "Apol." II:14.

10 "Dial." 93.

to such an extent in his exposition of demonical influence "that the exercise of that faculty is not only greatly reduced but becomes almost impossible."<sup>11</sup> A brief examination of the passages adduced to support this objection will show that the influence of the demons is not so universal nor so strong in those under the spell of diabolical power as to render the faculty of moral cognition practically impotent. The following text speaks for itself: "These evil demons showed such fearful sights to men that those who did not use their reason in judging of the actions that were done, were struck with terror and called them (the demons) gods."<sup>12</sup> The use of the faculty of moral cognition is obviously not considered as "almost impossible" in the words: "We forewarn you to be on your guard lest those demons divert you from understanding what we say. For they subdue all who make no strong opposing effort for their own salvation."<sup>13</sup> Another text adduced to prove the objection is the following: "We know that the wicked angels appointed laws conformable to their own wickedness, in which men who are like them delight; and the right Reason proved that not all opinions nor all doctrines are good."<sup>14</sup> Immediately preceding this text we find the complaint of some that the laws of men are diverse, that there is not a definite standard of good and bad in their laws. Justin views the complaint as justifiable. The influence of the demons is given as the cause for the absence of this standard in those who wanted the criterion of justice abolished. The very demand of a practical standard of justice in legislation argues the presence of moral cognition. The reality of unjust legislation is a fact that can be recognized and deplored by the faculty of moral cognition only.

The grievousness of sinful thoughts is thoroughly un-

<sup>11</sup> "Zur Beurteilung des Christentums Justins des Maertyrers, Flemming, pp. 14, 16. In a footnote on page 25 Flemming apparently retracts his objection.

<sup>12</sup> "Apol." I:5.

<sup>13</sup> "Apol." I:14.

<sup>14</sup> "Apol." II:9.



derstood and propounded by Justin. "Not only he who in act commits adultery is rejected by Him, but also he who desires to commit adultery; since not only our own works but also our thoughts are open before God."<sup>15</sup> In another passage he wished to correct the view of the heathens who judged the external sinful acts as wrong, but left the intention out of consideration: "Those persons, if they learned and were convinced that nothing, whether actually done or only intended, can escape the knowledge of God, would by all means live decently."<sup>16</sup>

It would seem from the first text quoted above to show Justin's view of the sinfulness of interior transgressions that he did not distinguish between thoughts and desires. There is no text, to our knowledge, that would give evidence of Justin's attention to this finer point of interior morality.

From one who has so explicitly condemned the sinfulness of wicked desires and evil thoughts we may rightly expect the condemnation of sinful speech: "All kinds of filthy conversation"<sup>17</sup> is an expression Justin uses in speaking of the degraded condition in which now faithful members of Christianity had lived before their conversion. Lying receives especial mention in his Discourse to the Greeks.<sup>18</sup>

Among the sins of deed, murder, of course, has a conspicuous place. It is interesting to learn the reason Justin gives why Christians should not commit suicide. The major of his argument contains the two-fold doctrine, that God made the world for the sake of the human race, and that He takes pleasure in having the human race imitate "His properties". "If then", follows the minor, "we all kill ourselves, we shall become the cause, as far as in us lies, why no one should be born, or instructed in the divine doctrines."<sup>19</sup> The conclusion, which, moreover, shows Justin's clear concept of the nature of sin,

15 "Apol." I:15.

16 "Apol." I:12.

17 "Dial." 116.

18 "Disc." 2.

19 "Apol." II:4.

condemns the act of killing as being in opposition to the will of God.

The wickedness of sins of the flesh is treated in many passages.<sup>20</sup> The scathing denunciations of the various sins of impurity show how strong the face of Christianity was set against this vice. A passage in the Discourse to the Greeks speaks in a detailed manner of occasions that lead to shameful deeds. Even the influence of improper music is touched upon. "There are excessive banquettings and subtle flutes which provoke to lustful movements, and useless and luxurious anointings and crowning with garlands."<sup>21</sup> The text which Justin quotes from Isaias (III. 16) is apparently not applied by him to temptations against purity. "The daughters of Sion have walked with outstretched necks, and wanton glances of their eyes, and made a noise, as they walked, with their feet and moved in a set space." The context refers chiefly to pride.<sup>22</sup>

Idolatry, perjury, wrath, covetousness, envy, hatred are among the sins condemned by Justin as grievous.

In summing up the matter we have gathered from the most prominent apologist of the second century, we may state that Justin is the first moralist who has dealt so extensively with the nature of grievous sin. He has defended well the part that free will and moral cognition take in the conditions required for the imputability of serious guilt. It may be stated that he is also the first to mention explicitly a *levitas peccati*. We have, however, not found in any of his works a definition of the nature of light sin. His enumeration of grievous sins agrees with the traditional views.

<sup>20</sup> "Apol." I:4, 5, 9, 14, 15, 25, 26.

<sup>21</sup> "Disc." 4.

<sup>22</sup> "Dial." 27.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ST. IRENAEUS.

In the writings of this venerable bishop of Lyons (+202 A.D.) we do not find so explicit and extensive a doctrinal exposition of the concept of grievous sin as we have seen in the documents of Justin. Irenaeus does not deal with the elementary constituents of sin; he obviously presupposes the knowledge thereof in his works against the heretics of his day, who had distorted the views of Christian morality once correctly imparted and accepted.

That Irenaeus had a clear concept of serious sin is easily deduced from the texts we are to consider. He distinguishes between those who unite themselves by faith to God, and those who by shunning the light have separated themselves from God and have deprived themselves of all good.<sup>1</sup> Heretics and apostates from the truth are patrons of the serpent and of death.<sup>2</sup> Sinful men lead lives "contrary to reason".<sup>3</sup> They are contrasted with "spiritual men" who have received the spirit of God into the union of flesh and spirit.<sup>4</sup> Those who have given themselves over to "filthiness, gluttony and recklessness of all sorts" have cast out from themselves "the life-giving Word".<sup>5</sup> Sinful deeds are detested by God.<sup>6</sup> Defilement is contracted by eating meats sacrificed to idols.<sup>7</sup> False doctrines are "the bitter and malignant poison of the serpent."<sup>8</sup> We should seek through faith and chaste conversations to preserve the Spirit of God, "lest having become non-participative of the Divine Spirit we lose the kingdom of heaven."<sup>9</sup>

1 "Adv. Haer.," V, c. 28:1; Minge, "Pg.," Vol. 7; "Ante-Nicene Fathers," Vol. 1.

2 "Adv. Haer.," III, c. 18:8.

3 "Adv. Haer.," V, c. 8:2.

4 "Ibid."

5 "Adv. Haer.," V, c. 8:4.

6 "Adv. Haer.," IV, c. 24:1.

7 "Adv. Haer.," I, c. 6:3.

8 "Adv. Haer.," I, c. 27:4.

9 "Adv. Haer.," V, c. 9:3.



Irenaeus lays special stress on the fact that sin is, in its nature, not a matter of indifference. The contention of the heretics, that adultery and eating of things sacrificed to idols, grievous sins in general, were of no further consequence, brought out the opposition of Irenaeus. He condemns at considerable length the heretical doctrine, that "carnal things should be allowed to the carnal."<sup>10</sup> The heretic Basilides "attaches no importance to meats offered in sacrifice to idols" and asserts that lust in all forms is a matter of indifference.<sup>11</sup> Carpocrates and his followers are accused of unbridled madness in maintaining "that things are evil or good simply in virtue of human opinion."<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus quotes the Apocalypse to prove the falsehood of the Nicolaitanian doctrine, that adultery and eating of things sacrificed to idols are matters of indifference.<sup>13</sup> Marcion's doctrine that murder, sodomy and all kinds of abominations are authorized by God is mentioned as coming from "the mouth of the devil."<sup>14</sup>

Knowledge and free will as prerequisites to imputability are quite easily deduced from the following text: "Man, being endowed with reason, having been made free in his will, is himself the cause to himself that sometimes he becomes wheat and sometimes chaff."<sup>15</sup> A whole chapter of more than usual length is devoted to the proof of the doctrine that man is endowed with the faculty of making a choice.<sup>16</sup> Part of another chapter explains quite extensively the faculty of moral cognition.<sup>17</sup>

The remissibility of sin is a doctrine well defended in the writings of Irenaeus.<sup>18</sup> In one passage, however, there seems to be a difficulty concerning this teaching.

<sup>10</sup> "Adv. Haer.," I, c. 6:3.

<sup>11</sup> "Adv. Haer.," I, c. 2:4, 5.

<sup>12</sup> "Adv. Haer.," I, c. 25:4.

<sup>13</sup> "Adv. Haer.," I, c. 26:3.

<sup>14</sup> "Adv. Haer.," I, c. 27:3.

<sup>15</sup> "Adv. Haer.," IV, c. 4:3.

<sup>16</sup> "Adv. Haer.," IV, 37.

<sup>17</sup> "Adv. Haer.," IV, c. 39:1.

<sup>18</sup> "Zkt.," 1908, p 488 ss

An impartial examination of the context will, we believe, solve the seeming contradiction between this and other statements of Irenaeus on the remission of sins. "Christ shall not die again in behalf of those who now commit sin."<sup>19</sup> In the same paragraph we read: "We ought to fear, lest perchance, if we do things displeasing to God, after the knowledge of Christ, we obtain no further forgiveness of sins, but be shut out from His kingdom."<sup>20</sup> The context suggests the warning that we should avoid sin because we might become hardened therein.

The first passage in the early documents of the Fathers that contains the "thought, word, and deed" division of sin in concise form is found in the writings of Irenaeus. "Christ not only turned His disciples away from evil deeds, but even from words and thoughts."<sup>21</sup> That Irenaeus did not wish to permit hereby the deduction that words and thoughts are merely preliminary to sin in deed is quite evident from passages which show that he considered certain words and thoughts sinful. Unchaste conversations would make us "non-participative of the Divine Spirit."<sup>22</sup> An impious opinion of the heretics is "refuted by the teaching of the Lord with whom not only is the adulterer rejected, but also the man who desired to commit adultery."<sup>23</sup> In the texts just quoted the terms "non-participative" and "rejected" leave no room for doubt that the sins mentioned are grievous.

Murder, adultery, fornication, theft, fraud, and "whatever things are done to our neighbor's prejudice" are evil and detested by God.<sup>24</sup> Heresy and apostasy are, as we have seen, the sins of those "who show themselves patrons of the serpent and of death."<sup>25</sup> Anger without cause brings on damnation.<sup>26</sup> The text shows that anger

19 "Adv. Haer.," IV, c. 27:2.

20 "Adv. Haer.," IV, c. 27:2.

21 "Adv. Haer.," II, c. 32:2.

22 "Adv. Haer.," V, c. 9:3.

23 "Adv. Haer.," II, c. 32:1.

24 "Adv. Haer.," c. 24:1. (IV).

25 "Adv. Haer.," III, c. 18:8.

26 "Adv. Haer.," II, c. 32:1.

*per se* is not necessarily a grievous wrong. All swearing, especially false swearing, is to be avoided, but no degree of guilt is mentioned.<sup>27</sup>

Irenaeus has shown us, in practical terminology, the nature of sin. Particular stress is placed on the doctrine that grievous sin is not a matter of arbitrary opinion. He has explained the elementary requisites of imputability. Sins of thought, word, and deed receive explicit mention, likewise various kinds of sin. Sins of a non-grievous nature are not given any consideration, because of the fact, that perhaps, in dealing with the heretics of his day, Irenaeus could show the falsity of their doctrines by the more palpable errors concerning evidently grievous transgressions.

From the documents of other writers toward the end of the second century we may gain a few points of considerable value for our present investigation. Athenagoras of Athens has contributed the most among the minor writers. The following passage seems to carry the conviction that when speaking of sin the writers meant not so much the habit of sin, or its repetition, as the single act. "You know that those whose life is directed towards God as its rule—so that each one among us may be blameless and irreproachable before Him,— will not entertain even the thought of the slightest sin."<sup>28</sup> In another passage Athenagoras likewise speaks apparently of non-grievous sin. "As to those who are persuaded that nothing will escape the scrutiny of God... it is not likely that they will commit even the smallest sin."<sup>29</sup> It is not improbable that non-grievous sin, or as we term it, venial sin, was understood by the Christians of his day. The texts adduced however prove only this con-

<sup>27</sup> "Ibid."

<sup>28</sup> "Legatio pro Christianis," c. 31.; "Anf.," Vol. II. "ἴστε τοὺς μὴδ' εἰς ἐννοίαν ποτε τοῦ βραχυτάτου ἐλευσομένους ἁμαρτήματος. Eos non ignoratis ne cogitationem quidem unquam vel levissimi admissuros peccati." Migne, "P. G.," VI, 961, 962.

<sup>29</sup> Legatio pro Christianis, c. 36. Οὐδείς λόγος ἔχει οὐδὲ τῶν βραχυτάτων τι ἁμαρτεῖν. "Eos ne levissimum quidem peccatum admissuros consentaneum est. Migne, 'P. G.," VI, 969, 970.



clusively that sins were graded according to seriousness of offense.

Improper thoughts, even if momentary, but committed with deliberation, are grievous sins according to his adaptation of a passage from some apocryphal writing: "If any one kiss a second time because it has given him pleasure (he sins) . . if there be mixed with it (i. e. with the kiss of salutation) the least defilement of thought, it excludes us from eternal life."<sup>30</sup>

Presence at sinful spectacles was considered wrong. The Christians "have abjured the contests (fights of gladiators) because they deem seeing a man put to death the same as killing him."<sup>31</sup>

Aristides of Athens speaks of the good life of the Christians in a manner that leaves no doubt as to what they thought of a single evil act.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> "Legatio," 32.

<sup>31</sup> "Legatio," 35.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. "Apology," 15. "Ante-Nicene Fathers," IX, p. 263.



## SECOND PART

**Tertullian.**





## CHAPTER VII.

## PRELIMINARIES. TERTULLIAN'S WORKS. HIS VIEWS ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

The most important contributor, among the early writers, to the subject matter under discussion in this study is Tertullian.<sup>1</sup> Of his thirty extant works, at least fifteen treat of practical morality and kindred subjects. His works are mostly all of a polemical nature and some of his ascetico-moral writings are extremely so.<sup>2</sup> If *De Baptismo*<sup>3</sup> may be counted among Tertullian's practico-ascetical writings, we have eight books from his Catholic period, seven date from his Semi-Montanistic years, and four were written after his conversion to Montanism. His Catholic, his semi-Montanistic, and his Montanistic attitude must be taken into consideration in adjudging the value of his opinions on moral questions, especially since Semi-Montanism, and all the more so Montanism, give his writings a plainly discernible taint of rigorism. The change in his attitude towards the remission of sins committed after baptism, his rigoristic views of sins committed directly against God, his Montanistic view of remission of sins independent of the Church, all have to be taken into account in weighing Tertullian's authority on moral topics.

Nor must it be forgotten that Tertullian's "burning eloquence, biting satire, compact and forcible logic"<sup>4</sup> are important elements in all his writings and especially in those treating of moral subjects, when the nature of the matter gave his tendencies full sway. In his apologetical and dogmatico-polemical treatises he feels himself con-

1 Bardenhewer calls Tertullian "the most prolific of all the Latin writers; he is also the most original and personal." Bardenhewer-Shahan "Patrology," p. 179, Freiburg i. B., 1908.

2 E. g. "De Monogamia, De Pudicitia, De Jejuniis adversus Psychicos."

3 De Labriolle, "Tertullian," p. IX (Introd.), Paris, 1906.

4 Bardenhewer, op. cit., p. 180.

strained to follow carefully the lines laid down for him in the "rule of faith." In the works on the practical everyday life of the Christian, Tertullian seems conscious of a certain latitude in thought and expression. However, since his forensic mind seeks exactness he tends towards rigorism. Oratorical means and dialectics supplant at times the requisites of logic.

A brief review of the principal works of Tertullian from which we shall quote in the course of this study to gain his opinion on the concept of personal sin will serve as a guide in evaluating the texts adduced.<sup>5</sup> *De Spectaculis* is an interesting disquisition on the reasons why Christians are forbidden to attend shows and public pleasures. Vanity, immorality, idolatry, superstition, abuse of God's name, and the passionate excitement are some of the reasons under discussion. *De Oratione* exhorts Christians to order their lives according to the contents of the "Our Father", and interprets prayer-rubrics with an ascetical intent. *De Baptismo*, principally a dogmatic treatise, speaks in some passages of sins and their remission. *De Patientia* extols the nature of patience, shows its connection with the beautitudes, with forgiveness, with charity and with other divine precepts, and points out the scope, influence and results of impatience.

The most important work of Tertullian's Catholic

<sup>5</sup> The following table, giving the chronological sequences of Tertullian's extant works and showing to what period they are to be ascribed, will give us at a glance a basis for their value from the Catholic standpoint. The order given is the one followed by D'Alès, "La Théologie de Tertullien," p. XIII (Introd.), Paris, 1905: I. Catholic period, before 206: "Ad Martyres, Ad Nationes" (2 books), "Apologeticum," "De Testimonio Animae," "De Spectaculis," "De Praescriptione Haereticorum," "De Oratione," "De Baptismo," "De Patientia," "De Paenitentia," "De Cultu Feminarum" (2 books), "Ad Uxorem" (2 books), "Adversus Hermogenem," "Adversus Judaeos." II. Semi-Montanistic period, 206-212: "De Virginibus Velandis," "Adversus Marcionem" (4 books), "De Pallio," "Adversus Valentinianos," "De Anima," "De Carne Christi," "De Re-surrectione Carnis," "Adversus Marcionem" (5th book), "De Exhortatione Castitatis," "De Corona," "Scorpiace," "De Idololatria," "Ad Scapulam." III. Montanistic period, after 213: "De Fuga in Persecutione," "Adversus Praxeam," "De Monogamia," "De Jejunio adversus Psychicos," "De Pudicitia."



period dealing with morality is *De Paenitentia*. It explains the nature, origin, practice, and the demands of penance. Various divisions of sin are somewhat extensively dwelt upon. A very profuse discussion of the influences that supposedly or really lead to sin are found in *De Cultu Feminarum*. Modesty in the apparel of women and men, the origin of ornamentation, the permissibility of certain refinements in dress, and other related subjects, receive lengthy attention. *Ad Uxorem*, while preferring celibacy, upholds the dignity of marriage, permits more than one marriage but places widowhood in a sense even above virginity and forbids marriages between Christians and heathens. The books thus far mentioned belong, as indicated in the table given in footnote, to the Catholic period of Tertullian.

*De Virginibus Velandis* shows signs of rigorism in dealing with a matter closely related to the theme of *De Cultu Feminarum*. A rather abstract discussion of the power of volition is followed by a lengthy tirade against second marriage in *De Exhortatione ad Castitatem*. A specific case of conflict between Christian and heathen principles of worship is brought in *De Corona*. The treatise *De Idololatria* speaks chiefly of the sin of idolatry but it also brings out some fine points of co-operation. These four works of Tertullian show a leaning, which in some passages is quite evident, towards Montanistic rigorism.

The works of the Montanistic period contain much that pertains to the concept of personal sin. *De Fuga in Persecutione* proposes and solves, of course in a Montanistic sense, the necessity of open profession of faith. Second Marriage is attacked in *De Monogamia*. The fasting discipline of the Psychics is denounced, that of the Pneumatics is defended in *De Jejuniis*. An uncompromising attitude toward those who were guilty of certain sins of the flesh is taken in Tertullian's best known Montanistic work, *De Pudicitia*.

An important element that must ever be considered in weighing Tertullian's morality views is his concept of

practical Christianity. The discernibly distinct stages of his narrowing asceticism are of decisive influence on his presentation of discipline. The rigorism of his Catholic period grew into fanaticism as he gradually drifted away from the Church. The impossible demands of his Montanistic morality were to some extent the outgrowth of an exaggeratedly strict system of striving for a state of perfection with which Tertullian identified the dutiful following of Christ. They were not due merely to the opposition he had caused himself by leaving the Church.<sup>6</sup>

In evident contrast to heathen morality founded on human opinion and limited thereby, stands that of Christianity, based on God's authority and co-extensive with the perfect knowledge of goodness.<sup>7</sup> Between theory and practice there is no distinction. "We alone are without crime" is his challenging statement. The very knowledge of God's laws leaves no middle choice between Christian sinlessness and heathen depravity.<sup>8</sup> The thorough knowledge of Christian duties, the ever present consciousness of an all-seeing God, and the fear of everlasting punishment spur the believer on to the goal, namely a "blameless life."<sup>9</sup> The view of a blameless life is upheld by Tertullian almost constantly, though there are passages, comparatively few, however, in which he makes concessions to human frailty and does not reckon alone with the "perfect knowledge."

Christian modesty is perfect modesty. It execrates even the desire for sin. The life of a believer must be so holy and so perfect in accordance with faith that he will possess confidence and security as to his remaining unstained by sin. Tertullian realizes, however, that, per-

6 D'Alès, "La Théol. de Tert.," p. 497; Noeldechen, "Tertullian," p. 491 sqq., Gotha, 1890.

7 "Apol.," XLV.

8 "Apol.," *ibid.*

9 "Apol.," *ibid.*—We may discern here the perfect and the imperfect motives of leading a life without sin. From other passages to be adduced later, e. g., "Paen.," *passim*, we may conclude that the "ample knowledge" contains by its very nature, the motive of perfect love, God, goodness in itself.

fect as the Christian should be, he must not live in presumption. Falling into sin will always remain possible.<sup>10</sup> The passage to which we have just referred in footnote shows how much stress Tertullian puts on the absolute obligation of being perfect, but also how much he fears that in reality the weakness of the flesh will assert itself. Not only should artificial or studied comeliness be rejected, but even "natural grace should be obliterated by concealment and negligence."<sup>11</sup> The former, he claims, is "most perilous" as an occasion of concupiscence. The latter should be feared because of the jealousy of suitors. Moreover, natural beauty is unnecessary and vainglorious. The passage brings out in strong relief the continual conflict between the ideal and the real in Tertullian's concept of morality. Much of the difficulty in understanding Tertullian's inconsistent statements concerning sin in some passages is overcome by observing his mental attitude towards the principle of idealism or perfection in Christianity and the shortcomings that occur in the application of the ideal standard to the life of the ordinary faithful. The attempt to make the ideal an accomplished fact undoubtedly had its influence on Tertullian's moral views.

Faithfulness in contracts, sacredness of fidelity in married life, honesty with all trusts, absence of revenge, helping the needy, these virtues are inherent realities in Christian life. Those who lack these virtues are repudiated by the Christian community and but falsely pretend to belong thereto.<sup>12</sup> The perfection required of the Christian as just mentioned, cannot be said to be exaggerated because of Tertullian's Semi-Montanistic asceticism. A like rigorism do we find in his Catholic period. Those whom heresies have torn away from the faithful "ought never to have been esteemed as prudent or faithful or approved." Final perseverance makes

<sup>10</sup> "Cult. Fem.," II, 2.

<sup>11</sup> "Cult. Fem.," *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> "Scap.," IV; "Ad Scapulam" is given in D' Alès' list of Tertullian's works as the last book of the Semi-Montanistic period.



the real Christian.<sup>13</sup> He who falls away never deserved the name of Christian. Though it is here a question of faith only, we see the conflict between Tertullian's ideals and the realization of the deplorable fact that some desert the ranks of the faithful. The admission is implied that falling away from the faith is after all not an extraordinary thing. But the argument given by Tertullian why such a sin should not cause consternation does not seem applicable. To the Son of God alone, he argues, was it reserved to remain without sin. The argument would not favor the ideal of perfection he implies in the statements preceding it.<sup>14</sup> We could not urge as an inconsistency in the texts: *Soli enim Dei filio servabatur sine delicto permanere* and *Nemo Christianus, nisi qui ad finem usque perseveraverit*.<sup>15</sup> Saul, David and Solomon are adduced as examples of frailty to show that even the best fall. Hence, we should not consider the sin of heresy as something extraordinary. Christ is the only one who remained free from sin. Even if a martyr fell away from the faith, that would not prove the truth of any heretical doctrine. The truth of faith does not depend, therefore, on persons. But then we find Tertullian stating that to be a Christian means to persevere to the end. The proposition Tertullian had set himself to prove appears rather confused in the passage quoted from *Praesc. Haer.* The ideal of Christian perfection is predominant more by intent of the writer than by the content of the writing. While we would not want to make the unqualified statement that Tertullian's asceticism controlled his doctrinalism, we are strongly inclined to believe that rigorism swayed his beliefs.

In protesting against persecution Tertullian calls attention to the fact that among the prisoners awaiting sentence there are no Christians, none at least who are

<sup>13</sup> "Praesc. Haer.," III.

<sup>14</sup> "Praesc. Haer.," III, 5, in edition of de Labriolle, p. 6, Paris, 1907.

<sup>15</sup> "Praesc. Haer.," *ibid.*

imprisoned for any other cause but that of bearing the name of Christian. If a so-called Christian is to be found in the public prison for any other cause than that of his faith he is no longer a Christian. Virtuous and Christian are synonyms.<sup>16</sup> Those members of the faithful community who depart from "our rules of discipline" are no longer to be counted Christians. Of course the Christians are not guilty of any serious crimes. "We alone are without crime."<sup>17</sup> Theft,<sup>18</sup> homosexuality, marital infidelity,<sup>19</sup> incontinence,<sup>20</sup> atrocities, seduction, sacrilege,<sup>21</sup> are not to be found among the faithful. The Christian's grace-healed eyes are sightless when there is question of lustful books. The assaults of passion do not affect him. His modesty of behavior is plainly of a superior kind.<sup>22</sup> He is not proud even when dealing with the poor.<sup>23</sup> Indeed the Christians are remarkable for the reformation of their former vices.<sup>24</sup>

With all this idealism Tertullian admits the undeniable facts of sinfulness that confront him in Christian communities. There are exceptions too, he reluctantly grants, but he immediately adds the restriction that such are rejected.<sup>25</sup> The whole treatise *De Spectaculis*, an admission that there are Christians who do not meet with the high expectations of the asceticist, is a reprimand of those Christians who indulge in worldly pleasures. Some of the faithful evidently adhered to the views of heathens as to the permissibility of certain worldly pleasures which, however, are "not consistent with true religion and true obedience to the true God."<sup>26</sup> For these pleasures bring about wrath, anger, bitterness, rivalry and grief, which are entirely out of keep-

16 "Apol." 44.

17 "Apol." 45.

18 "Scap." 2, "Apol." 44.

19 "Apol." 46.

20 Ibid.

21 "Apol." 44.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 "Scap." 2.

25 "Apol." 46.

26 "Spect." 1.

ing with the religion of Christ,<sup>27</sup> and which they "who are consecrated to peace, should never indulge in."<sup>28</sup> Listening to improper recitations in the shows is forbidden, looking at disgraceful deeds likewise, and no Christian who visits the shows can justify such action on the plea that the immodest speech and the immodest deed, not the hearing or the seeing immodest things, are sinful. Going from religious services to the profanities of the circus, "from God's Church to the devil's", is something monstrous.<sup>29</sup> Tertullian plainly implies that some Christians go to heathen meetings and assemblies where God's name is blasphemed. They should remember, he warns, that though their adherence to the Christian faith is not shown externally at these gatherings there is a God above who sees all things. Tertullian appears painfully impressed by those who in ingratitude fail to recognize God's "pleasures". He seeks to win them over by placing before them the worthy spiritual substitutes for the worldly enjoyments.<sup>30</sup> The pleasure-seeking Christians who delight in the literature of the stage should put that aside and take up the verses, sentences, songs "of our own", the fightings and wrestlings of the circus should be replaced by contests between virtue and vice.<sup>31</sup> While regretting the worldly-mindedness of Christians, Tertullian rises to the lofty heights of his ideal Christianity and demands of the faithful a perfection that would grace the members of religious orders. Contempt of all worldly things, distaste of pleasure, living to God befit a Christian.<sup>32</sup> The passionate appeal of the closing chapter of *De Spectaculis* seems a fair warning to all to abstain from the shows that they may not tremble on the day of "the great judgment." In fact, the perfection of the ordinary faithful seems to have been of so high an order that seeking after divine

27 "Spect." 15.

28 "Spect." 16.

29 "De coelo in caenum," "Spect." 25.

30 "Spect." 29.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.



revelations and miraculous cures are mentioned among the noblest pleasures considered by Tertullian as becoming to Christian men.

His rigorism, tempered however by a realization of its own exaggeration will guard us against taking his statements at their face value. A conservative principle, therefore, which could be applied in weighing Tertullian's morality doctrines, could be summed up, perhaps, in the statement that Tertullian's standard of morality is perceptibly higher than the one applied in the ordinary life of his time and is to be considered substantially modified by his Semi-Montanistic and Montanistic tendencies and teachings.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## TERTULLIAN'S VIEW ON THE NATURE OF SIN.

Tertullian speaks at great length of various kinds of sins, of the remissibility or non-remissibility of sins and of other phases of the sin problem, but he discourses comparatively little on the nature of sin<sup>1</sup> That is perhaps due to the fact that Tertullian's principal object in writing on moral-ascetical questions was the practical application of Christian doctrine of transgression of the law in everyday life. His purpose at times was to place before non-Christians the actual perfection that was expected of the faithful and was actually to be met with in the daily life of the conscientious observer of the precepts given by the rule of faith and the rule of discipline. Tangible arguments, the Carthaginian was well aware, appealed most to a world steeped in materialism. Abstract treatment of moral subjects is comparatively rare in the works of Tertullian.<sup>2</sup>

St. Augustine's definition of sin is as follows: *Peccatus est factum vel dictum vel concupitum aliquid contra legem aeternam*.<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas defines sin as an *actus humanus malus*.<sup>4</sup> The *materia* is the act, word or deed, the *forma* is the opposition to the eternal law.<sup>5</sup> The nearest approach to the definition of St. Augustine, as explained by St. Thomas, in the works of Tertullian is in *De Paenitentia*. In a chapter which treats more explicitly of the nature of sin than any other part of Tertullian's works, he gives the following rather general definition: that from which God bids us abstain is to be

1 De Labriolle, "Tertullien," p. XIV. (Introd.)

2 "Cor.," c. II, Oehler I, p. 418 sqq. "Tertulliani Opera Omnia," Lipsiae, 1854.

3 "Contra Faustum Manich." I, XXII. c. 27 Migne "PL." XLII 418.

4 "Summa Theol." 1a, 2ae, q. 71, art. 7.

5 St. Augustine uses "eternal law" and "divine law" as synonyms. Koch-Preuss, "Handbook of Moral Theology" II, p. 1, 1st ed.

accounted sin. He adds, however, that God is "some great essence of good." Sin is an evil that displeases that good. Between God and sin there can be no friendship. Tertullian limits the full knowledge of the opposition between the great essence of good and sin to those who know the Lord and are looked upon favorably by Him, that is, those who come to the knowledge of the truth and of the Lord's precepts.<sup>6</sup>

St. Augustine's definition of sin is specific and detailed, that of Tertullian is in itself quite elementary, but considered in the context it represents a thoroughly Christian concept of moral evil. It is God under the aspect of the infinite good who is displeased with the transgression of His precepts. The *dominica praecepta* most probably mean all the precepts of the Lord. Hence we may conclude with some probability that, according to Tertullian, from the very nature of the Lord's precepts, the Christian is taught what constitutes sin. The source of the Christian's true knowledge of evil is therefore supernatural. If by *dominica praecepta* we are to understand the precepts of the Lord as summarized in the commandments of the love of God and the love of the neighbor the philosophical expatiation on sin as an opposition to the infinite good is understood as quite appropriate. In *Paen.* V. Tertullian speaks of the Lord's

6 "Paen." 3, De Labriolle pp. 8, 10. Quorum ergo paenitentia justa et debita videatur, id est, quae delicto deputanda sint, locus quidem expostulat denotare, sed otiosum videri potest. Domino enim cognito ultro spiritus a suo auctore respectus emergit ad notitiam veritatis, et admissus ad dominica praecepta ex ipsis statim eruditur id peccato deputandum a quo Deus arceat, quoniam, cum Deum grande quid bonum constet esse, utique bono nisi malum non displiceret, quod inter contraria sibi nulla amicitia est.—Tertullian most probably refers here to those who have been admitted to the Church through baptism. His words seem to imply that an explanation of sin is quite superfluous to those who know what acts demand a just and due repentance. The catechumens and neophytes are, most probably, the ones for whom the contents of this chapter are meant.—Cf. D'Alès, "L'Édit de Calliste," p. 137: "L' auteur s' adonne à l' instruction des catéchumènes et des néophytes."—The variations of sentence grouping of the texts quoted above in de Labriolle and Oehler are not consequential. Unless otherwise stated, the English versions of Latin texts are taken from "Anf."



precepts: *Jam quidem nullum ignorantiae praetextum tibi patrocinator, quod Domino agnito praeceptisque ejus admissis, denique paenitentia delictorum functus, rursus te in delicta restituís.*<sup>7</sup> There seems to be sufficient reason for the assumption that Tertullian had a very exact concept of sin, especially if we consider the thorough and extensive explanation which he gives on knowledge and free will as prerequisites for imputability. St. Augustine<sup>8</sup> specifies the manner in which sin can be committed as a *factum, dictum, concupitum*. Tertullian mentions here but two species,<sup>9</sup> the sins in body and in spirit.<sup>10</sup> This specification is in a technical sense more exact than that of St. Augustine.

The *quasi materiale* in Tertullian's concept of sin would be the material or the spiritual act, the *quasi formale* would be the opposition of the act to God, as the *grande quid bonum*. The *lex aeterna* of St. Augustine is the immediate object *circa quod* of a sinful act. The mediate but ultimate object *circa quod* of a sinful act according to Tertullian is God as the supreme good, the end of man. This deeper and more comprehensive view was apparently in Tertullian's mind in the chapter of *Paen.* under discussion.

Every sin is an aversion, in some sense, from man's ultimate end. It is not at all improbable that Tertullian had in mind a concept of sin that would contain all the elements of a definition for mortal and venial sin. But this supposition cannot be urged much because of the clause: *quod inter contraria sibi nulla amicitia est*. We have in this passage one of many instances in which the conflict between broad oratory and strict logic produces

7 "Praecepta Dominica" in "Pud." IX, 22, and XVI, 17, does not militate against the supposition as given above.

8 See also other definitions of sin e. g. S. Bonaventurae "Comment. in Sent." II, dist. 35, dub. 6, "Opera Omnia," Vol. II, p. 838 sq. Qparacchi, 1885.

9 "Paen." 3.

10 In another passage, "Apol." 36, Tertullian mentions four ways in which sin can be committed: wish, action, speech and thought.

uncertainty in the mind of the reader as to the exact meaning intended by the author.

The distinction between mortal and venial sin in Tertullian's works will be taken up at greater length in another chapter. But we mention the possibility of a distinction in the passage we have been considering to show that in Tertullian's allusion to the deeper, abstract concept of sin there is insinuated a quite comprehensive grasp of moral evil by the exponents of Christian faith in the early centuries. Worthy of consideration is also the statement of Tertullian in connection with his remarks on sin in *Paen.* III that it may seem unnecessary to dwell on the subject announced, namely, what should be set down under the head of sin.<sup>11</sup> The conclusion seems justifiable that the early Christians were well instructed as to the nature and kinds of sin.

The comparison between St. Augustine's definition of sin, which has been adopted by St. Thomas and is the usual textbook definition, and Tertullian's concept might seem unfair. But stress has been laid on the thoroughness of Tertullian's concept in comparison with the accepted definition of St. Augustine to show how well the idea of sin was grasped by the first Latin expounder of the notion of evil transgression. It may be correctly stated therefore that at the close of the second century Christianity had as well developed a concept of sin as in the centuries of technical and scientific theology. Later centuries have not added anything substantially new to Tertullian's concept of the nature of sin. Systematic theology has assigned the concept its appropriate place and has formulated for it a terminology by which it would fit better into the scheme of theological thought.

The other passages of Tertullian that have reference to the nature of sin do not show us sin in its final analysis as something directly opposed to the supreme good, but they treat sin under different relations and aspects. Sin is something objective, it does not depend upon a

<sup>11</sup> "Paen." 3. de Labriolle, p. 8.

subjective view. This is the point Tertullian brings out in his criticism of the soul theories of Carpocrates. According to Carpocrates the soul must be recalled into existence in the prison of the body to display "all those blemishes which are considered to disfigure it." "Nothing is accounted evil by nature but simply as men think of it."<sup>12</sup> The question of an erroneous conscience does not enter here. The eternal law of God, not the fickle mind of man, is decisive as to the malice of the human act. Nor do the external circumstances of time and place alter the objectivity of evil. Tertullian criticizes severely the vain reasons of those who would see little or no guilt in attending the shows where lewdness, arrogance and cruelty are participated in by the audience, but who would, of course, admit that these faults are worthy of condemnation outside the boundaries of the circus. The general principle as to the objective immutability of evil is summed up in the words: "That which is really good or really evil cannot be aught else."<sup>13</sup> The absolute nature of evil is fixed by the truth of God which is not subject to change of opinion, nor to varying judgments.<sup>14</sup> In opposition to the Christian view of evil as of something unchangeable Tertullian points out the fickle morality views of the heathen, who "holds a thing evil and good as it suits self-will and passion."<sup>15</sup>

In his Montanistic period Tertullian adds some elements to the concept of sin which he hardly would have accepted in his Catholic years.<sup>16</sup> Flight in time of persecution is an evil according to Tertullian for a two-fold reason. In the first place persecution is a good in every respect and since it is a sin to refuse that which is good, flight in time of persecution is sinful. Again, persecution is a divine and reasonable appointment. Trying to escape it is equivalent to reproaching God with doing what is evil. Quite aware that these principles would

<sup>12</sup> "Anim." 35.

<sup>13</sup> "Spect." 20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "Spect." 21.

<sup>16</sup> "Fuga in Pers." 4, 5.



find opposition he puts up a lengthy defense of his viewpoint, in the course of which he confuses unwillingness to suffer with unwillingness to confess. The latter, he claims, is simply a denial of faith.<sup>17</sup>

Interpreting Plato's doctrine that the soul is divided into two parts, the rational and the irrational, Tertullian finds the origin of the rational element in the Author of Creation, who is Himself essentially rational. The irrational element, however, must be traced back to the instigation of the serpent. Sin is something inherently irrational, which proceeds from the devil.<sup>18</sup> If in other passages Tertullian speaks of the imputability of sin because of knowledge and free will, we may readily understand that he is not contradicting himself, since he has clearly placed before us his meaning of sin as of an act lacking right reason.<sup>19</sup>

In so far as sin gives things earthly precedence over things heavenly it is an offense that is committed directly against God. This description of sin would apply also to the sins committed against man, the other species of Tertullian's divisions of sin. The concrete case on which Tertullian bases his description of the nature of sin as the preference for the material is impatience at the loss of earthly goods. The immediate context would seem to indicate that Tertullian merely described the nature of one sin without applying the description to the whole class of sins, which in *De Pudicitia* he considers as directly committed against God.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Noeldechen, op. cit., p. 321

<sup>18</sup> "Anim." 16.

<sup>19</sup> "Anim." ibid. Oehler II, p. 579: a diabolo inrationale, a quo et delictum,—inrationale autem omne delictum.

<sup>20</sup> "Pat." VII. Oehler I, p. 601: Qui damni impatientia concitatur terrena caelestibus anteposendo, de proximo in deum peccat.—Cf. the use of "de proximo" in "Pat." V, "Cor." 7, "Apol." 27. It must be remembered that "Pat." is one of Tertullian's Catholic works in which we do not find the inconsistencies that later on were due to a change of heart.

## CHAPTER IX.

TERTULLIAN'S VIEW ON THE PREREQUISITES  
OF MORAL RESPONSIBILITY: COGNITION  
AND VOLITION.

The conditions required on the part of the soul for the responsibility in moral acts, namely knowledge and free will, are well expounded and defended by Tertullian. The discourses especially on the free will meet the expectations we would hold after perusing a few products of the Tertullianic mind. It is true, moral cognition, that is knowledge of sin *in genere* and *in specie* sufficient to make the transgressor accountable is not treated at length. It receives comparatively much less attention than moral volition. But that is easily accounted for on the general ground that the liberty of the will is the more attacked because it is the more difficult object of investigation. Nor is the fact to be lost sight of that Tertullian's express purpose in some parts of his works is the defense of the free will against heretical doctrines.

While expressing his view as to the localization of intelligence (i. e. of the soul in the heart of man) Tertullian gives voice to his opinion concerning the principle of intelligence in unmistakable words.<sup>1</sup> God has revealed, says Tertullian the solution to the question concerning the existence of a directing faculty of the soul.<sup>2</sup> He treats here the place of the soul. It would be outside the scope of the present investigation to treat at any length this localization phase of Tertullian's psychology. But the question of the principle of intelligence will be better understood if mention is made of the view Tertullian held, namely that the soul resides in the heart. Man does possess "a supreme principle of intelligence."<sup>3</sup> Tertullian deduces that proposition from sev-

1 "Anim." 15.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

eral texts of Sacred Scripture. In his view the texts contain plain references to the part the intellect is required to play in matters of morality. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness,"<sup>4</sup> and "Why think ye evil in your hearts?"<sup>5</sup> are the principal passages he brings as proofs from divine revelation for his statement that God has revealed the existence of intelligence. From the context one can conclude that Tertullian's object in adducing these texts was merely to prove the existence of an intelligence-principle that is of a moral cognition, in the soul. It was plainly not his object to show the necessity of knowledge as a prerequisite for moral imputability, but he does bring just those texts from which he argued the existence of an intelligence-principle because of its essential connection with accountability.

If we enter into the details of his argument, we find that he includes under the head of intelligence the will also. The supreme principle in the soul is according to Tertullian intellectual and vital. He calls this principle also the directing faculty of the soul, which would seem to imply that he did not at the time wish to insist on a distinction between intellect and will but merely aimed to prove the existence of a vital principle which he considered predominantly intellectual. Though the terms he uses in referring to the principle are in themselves more applicable to the will (ruling, directing), the very context seems to give conclusive evidence that he purposely omitted mentioning the will or wished to comprehend it under the term "vital principle." There are several passages, as we shall see later, in which he shows the existence, nature, influence, and importance of the will. The apparently intentional omission of any explicit mention of the blind faculty of the soul and the repeated insistence on the intellectuality of the ruling power, the existence of which he bases on texts inculcating, principally, accountability, would justify the conclusion that he stated, at least implicitly, the prerequisites of

4 "Romans" X, 10.

5 "Matthew" IX, 4



knowledge as an essentially necessary condition for acts that lead to righteousness or condemnation.<sup>6</sup>

There are several passages in Tertullian's works which would apparently argue against the conclusion we have drawn in the preceding lines. In the introduction to the work *De Spectaculis* he speaks of sinning through willful or real ignorance.<sup>7</sup> His request is that Christians should properly consider the subject of shows and thereby come to a real knowledge of the evil that lies in certain worldly pleasures. Sinning through willful ignorance is readily understood as sinning through unjustifiable vincible ignorance. The principle of imputability because of *voluntarium in causa* applies to willful ignorance. Sinning through real ignorance, however, is a morality view of Tertullian which must be considered in the proper setting if we would not accuse his Catholic mind of a strange inconsistency. There are no explicit textual references with which we could explain this view of Tertullian. But the general trend of the argument in *De Spectaculis* will, we think, offer a plausible solution to the difficulty.

We do not consider it necessary to have recourse to the explanation that by sins in real ignorance Tertullian had reference to material sin. Aside from the fact that Tertullian's concept of material sin is not ascertainable even in vague outlines, there seems to be sufficient reason in the first chapter of *De Spectaculis* alone to consider the sin of real ignorance as a formal transgression. The same sentence in which the term *ignorando* appears is a request that those who have testified and confessed and have had, therefore, a thorough acquaintance of the laws of Christian discipline review the reasons why

6 The conclusion drawn from Tertullian's chapter on the existence and localization of a supreme faculty is in no wise affected by his literal exegesis of the Scriptural texts adduced. "Anim." 15. The substance of his opinion of the essential connection between knowledge and transgression is plainly discernible even in his erroneous interpretation.

7 "Spect." 1. *Recognoscite, qui iam accessisse vos testificati et confessi estis, ne aut ignorando aut dissimulando quis peccet.* Oehler I, p. 17.

the public shows are forbidden. It would appear a rather forced supposition to assume that well instructed Christians should ever relapse into a real ignorance, an ignorance that could be called absolute or complete.

If we assume, however, that real ignorance is equivalent to unintentional ignorance, the conclusion is not far fetched that Tertullian had in mind those Christians, who, forgetful of a specific prohibition of spectacle pleasures, were nevertheless inexcusable because of the easily applied deductions from the general laws concerning Christian conduct. This supposition taken from the context is supported by a parallel passage in the *Apology*. There Tertullian speaks of the undutiful members of the human race who knew God in part and nevertheless gave themselves to the worship of false gods. For this they deserved ill at God's hand. But not merely for that. They continued to live in willful ignorance of the Teacher of righteousness.<sup>8</sup> Sin grew and flourished as a result of willful ignorance. We find in this passage an ignorance mentioned which was not complete but in which sin was imputable. We find here also an ignorance that was willful, productive of all vices and crime.<sup>9</sup> The text on sinning in ignorance in *De Spectaculis I* has reference to Christians, that in the *Apology* to men in general, but the similarity of concepts as to imputability in both passages make the conclusion plausible that by real ignorance is meant here a partial ignorance, not a complete lack of cognition. According to Tertullian, therefore, sin without knowledge was impossible. Imputability presupposed at least some knowledge of the wrongfulness of a transgression.

According to Tertullian the discernment of good and evil begins at about the fourteenth year of life. He quotes Asclepiades as fixing the same age but does not accept the physician's reason, namely the beginning of reflection. Nor does he allow that civil legislation referring to this point influenced his view. The age of

8 "Apol." 40.

9 Ibid.

discernment was a matter appointed from the very beginning of mankind.<sup>10</sup> The sensation of shame brought Adam and Eve to the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>11</sup> The period in life therefore in which the sensation of shame makes its appearance should be considered as the time in which the knowledge of good and evil begins. Tertullian calls that period the puberty of the soul<sup>12</sup> which coincides with the puberty of the body.<sup>13</sup>

The element of volition in imputability receives a much lengthier and a more thorough treatment from Tertullian than the element of cognition. The freedom of the will as a prerequisite condition in the accepted sense of moral responsibility is treated *ex professo* especially in the books against Marcion. There are many other works of Tertullian in which this subject, though mentioned incidentally, is sufficiently defined and described so as to give us a fair insight into the concept thereof.<sup>14</sup>

Tertullian finds the image and likeness of God in man represented by nothing so well as by the freedom of the will.<sup>15</sup> The spiritual essence which man received from God and the free will express man's likeness to the form of God.<sup>16</sup> Tertullian speaks in the passages here under consideration of the freedom and the power of the will.<sup>17</sup> The repeated distinction between freedom and power of

<sup>10</sup> "Anim." 38.—Cf. Engelbrecht in "Wiener Studien" p. 142 sqq., Wien., 1906.

<sup>11</sup> "Anim." *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Tertullian seems to realize that the argument of parallelism is somewhat far fetched, because Adam and Eve sinned first and then awakened to the knowledge of good and evil. He hints at a rather insufficient solution of the difficulty by making a distinction between the strictly natural concupiscence, the desire of ailments, and the sexual concupiscence, which at the age of puberty "surpasses the appointment of nature." "Anim," 38. "Anf." Vol. III, p. 219. Oehler II, p. 620: iam non ex instituto naturae, sed ex vitio.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> D'Alès, "La Théol. de Tert." p. 268 sqq.

<sup>15</sup> "Adv. Marc." II. 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. also "Adv. Marc." II, c. 6 *passim*.



the will would argue that Tertullian had some purpose in keeping the two qualifications of will-nature apart. One passage seems to indicate that he means by the power of the will the ability to render obedience to the law, and by liberty of the will the possibility of transgression. But immediately after this passage we have another, in which Tertullian apparently realizes that the distinction is not adequate or, at least, not of sufficient importance. There he explicitly extends the freedom of the will to resistance and obedience.<sup>18</sup>

The reason given by Tertullian why man's likeness to God is expressed in the freedom and power of the will is, as insinuated by Tertullian himself, an argument from analogy.<sup>19</sup> God is good by nature, man is disposed to good by creation. But that man might acquire a goodness by nature in a certain sense, God gave him a free will wherewith good acts could be performed spontaneously.<sup>20</sup> The freedom of the will is therefore in so far a constituent element in man's likeness to God as it makes possible for man to acquire and, consequently, possess a goodness by nature. The weak point of the analogy lies in the difference between the reality of God's own goodness and the possibility on the part of man of acquiring goodness. Tertullian does not consider the likeness as existing in the freewill of God and of man. His terms of comparison are God's goodness by nature and man's freewill as potentially good by a quasi-nature.

Having established the liberty of the will in man by deduction from the likeness and the image of God, Tertullian considers the conclusion that the freewill alone is to be held chargeable with the faults, which it has committed, as a matter of course. However, the chief con-

18 "Adv. Marc." II, c. 5, also c. 6.

19 In a certain sense a natural attribute of goodness. Cf. *ibid.*

20 "Adv. Marc." II, c. 6.

firmation of Tertullian's argument, perhaps more convincing than the argument itself, lies in the consideration that God would not have given man a law sanctioned by a penalty, were it not within the power of man to render or refuse obedience.<sup>21</sup> Tertullian refers to the will as a faculty that is independent. It is a natural and mutable faculty,<sup>22</sup> over which, however, the grace of God exercises its sway.<sup>23</sup> In enumerating the faculties of the soul he mentions the freedom of the will first.<sup>24</sup> The power to determine on a course of action is the one power that rests with man.<sup>25</sup>

In reply to a misinterpreted contention that nothing is done without the will of God, Tertullian implies that the freedom of the will of man with regard to sin is as fundamental a concept as that of God's existence.<sup>26</sup> The reason why the one concept is as necessary as the other is that God, without the free will of man, would be doing things He did not will,<sup>27</sup> in other words, the actually occurring transgressions of God's law by man would be caused by God Himself. Nor does the devil impose on man the volition to sin.<sup>28</sup> He merely offers the material.<sup>29</sup> Man becomes subject to the devil not by being forced to sin but by granting him a favorable opportunity. Tertullian knows no other manner of sinning except that which is done by the will. He does not want

21 Ibid.—We need not enter here on Tertullian's answers to Marcion's real or anticipated objections. The substance of the answers gives no new reference to the concept of personal sin.—In "Anim." 21 Tertullian calls attention to his demonstration of the existence of the free will.

22 "Anim." 21.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 "Exh. Cast." 2.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

to treat of sins imputed to chance, necessity or ignorance.<sup>30</sup>

It is an act of injustice to compel free men against their will to offer sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> Not only it is an injustice, it is an inconsistency, an absurdity.<sup>32</sup> Free will, not force, should lead men to religion.<sup>33</sup> Falling away from religion is considered involuntary if the act of apostasy is caused by violence, "the ingenuities of butchery" or "penal inflictions."<sup>34</sup> Tertullian calls such apostates sinners, involuntary, however, in comparison with the voluntary sinners of the flesh. The context shows that apostasy even when forced by crushing torture is still voluntary though much more excusable than other sins. The sin of fornication is shown, by contrast with the sin of apostasy, to be a transgression, about the voluntariness of which Tertullian sees no doubt. Lust is exposed to no violence except itself, it knows no coercion.<sup>35</sup>

In the passage just indicated, Tertullian seems to show at least a vague concept of the various degrees of *voluntarium*. The voluntariness by which one consents to sin in fear of violence arising from an external cause appeals to Tertullian as evidently much less imputable than

30 "Paen." III, 11, de Labriolle p. 12: Viderint enim, si qua casui aut necessitati aut ignorantiae imputantur, quibus exceptis jam non nisi voluntate delinquitur.—de Labriolle translates: Viderint enim, etc., quite freely with: Admettons que certains acts soient imputables au hasard, à la nécessité ou à l'ignorance.—Thelwall in "Anf." Vol. 3, p. 659, gives the version: Let them see to themselves.—Judging from Tertullian's view of the will, as explained even in his Semi-Montanistic "Exh. Cast." and from the context of the passage in "Paen." 3, we would be inclined to think that he considered imputability for sin as necessarily involving a free will. The sentence: Viderint, etc., is parenthetically inclosed between the question: Quid quod voluntas facti origo est? and the apparently indisputable assumption: Cum ergo facti origo est. The supposition that sin could be imputed to any other cause than the free will is discarded in an oratorical manner that leaves little doubt as to its purpose. The relative clause: quibus exceptis jam non nisi voluntate delinquitur, belonging to the parenthetical thought, does not disprove the interpretation given.

31 "Apol." 28.

32 Ibid.

33 "Ad Scap." 2.

34 "Pud." 22.

35 Ibid.



the voluntariness wherewith sin is consented to in mere gratification of an internal inclination. The standard of voluntariness is at least in this passage Tertullian's ultimate guide in judging the relative gravity of sin. The angels, too, that fell, did so of their own free will.<sup>36</sup> The concept contained, therefore, essentially the prerequisite of voluntariness, whether sin was committed by man or by angel.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> "Apol." 22.

<sup>37</sup> "Adv. Marc." IV, c. 16, in nowise impairs the deduction from Tertullian's works that he had a consistently correct concept of moral volition. In the chapter just quoted the incongruity can be shown to consist in the lack of the guiding principle of reciprocal action, usually formulated in the words of "Luke" VI, 31: "As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner."

## CHAPTER X.

## TERTULLIAN'S VIEW ON THE BEGINNINGS OF SIN.

The usually adduced sources of temptations, namely God's permission (*tentatio probationis*), the devil, the world and concupiscence are mentioned explicitly, and some of them are extensively treated in Tertullian's works. We find no formal definition of temptation in his writings, but he has given us sufficient matter to construe as adequate a concept thereof as we meet in ordinary textbooks of moral theology.

In explanation of the clause in the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," Tertullian warns us not to consider the Lord as the direct author of temptation.<sup>1</sup> God put Abraham's faith to the test not for the sake of tempting him<sup>2</sup> but with the purpose of placing before us a model in which we see obedience towards God's will and, in effect, the love of God as above all other affections. Tertullian conceives the trial of Abraham a probation, as we may gather from the wording: *non temptandae, sed probandae fidei*.<sup>3</sup> The clause of the Our Father concerning temptation Tertullian considers explained by the last petition: "Deliver us from evil."<sup>4</sup> The evil mentioned in the clause quoted, would be merely moral, since temptation and evil are here convertible concepts according to Tertullian. The adversative conjunction that joins the two classes is evidently a strong support for Tertullian's interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

In combating the idea that God is the author of temptation Tertullian recalls the passage of the Gospel<sup>6</sup> in

1 "Orat." 8.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 *Devehe nos a malo*. Ibid. Oehler I, p. 563. "Anf." Vol. 3, p. 684.

5 We know of no text reading that would favor Thelwall's translation: from the Evil One. "Anf." Vol. 3, p. 684.

6 "Matth." IV. 10, "Luke" IV. 8.

which Christ plainly shows who is the *praeses* and the *artifex* of temptation.<sup>7</sup> He expatiates on the distinction between *malum culpae* and *malum poenae*. Only the latter may be referred to God.<sup>8</sup> Pharaoh's denial of God, his idolatry and other sins are enumerated as the evils of guilt which are justly punished by the evil of penalty, namely the hardening of heart. The evils of guilt are morally bad. The evils of penalty are compatible with justice.<sup>9</sup> Though the devil is shown to be the author of moral evil, sufficient emphasis is placed on the doctrine that man in transgressing the divine law is the willful contemner thereof and as such is held responsible. The conflict between the concepts of the devil's authorship of sin and man's responsibility for wilful contempt of divine law is only apparent, for other passages in Tertullian's works give ample proof that the concepts were well kept distinct.

We are not prepared to state on the basis of Tertullian's theologico-ethical or philosophico-ethical terminology<sup>10</sup> that the concepts of man and devil as causes of sin were as clearly outlined in his time as in later periods. Probably less direct sin-causality is attributed to the devil now than in early Christianity because of our present-day disinclination to ascribe to preternatural agencies spiritual phenomena that in some manner or other might be explained by natural causality. It should be remarked however that there is enough evidence in Tertullian's works to show that authorship of sin on the part of man, in so far as the beginning of sin is co-extensive with temptation, was considered as attributable to natural agencies.<sup>11</sup>

Even in the present status of moral theology a clearly outlined scope of man's causality in sin, or the practical

7 "Orat." 8.

8 "Adv. Marc." II, c. 14.

9 Ibid.

10 Cf. "Adv. Marc. II, c. 14; "Anim." 21. "Apol." 14, 17, 22. "Bapt." 4, 20. "Adv. Marc." II, 28. "Pud." 6. "Paen." 3. "Pat." 5. "Cult. Fem." I, 2. II, 2, 9, 10, 12; "Virg. Vel." 2, 3, 7, 15. "Carn. Christi." 7; "Res. Carn." 62. Jej." 6. "Pud." 19.

11 "Anim." 20.



border line between temptation and sin proper, remains a desideration. Theoretically, of course, the difficulty is settled, but, as in other morality concepts, the practical concrete application of the concepts of sin-causality, authorship of sin, extent and content of temptation are matters that still invite discussion. The development of moral theology in the field of sin-genesis along psychological lines will probably give us a more enlightened understanding of these supremely important concepts, more important from the spiritual disciplinary standpoint than from a merely doctrinal view. The theoretically well-marked distinction between temptation and sin was not stated in so many words by Tertullian, although a cursory glance at the texts indicated in this chapter show that the traditional Catholic doctrine on the distinction between temptation and sin was as well established in Tertullian's day as in ours.

The spirit of man is expressly stated as the author of sin,<sup>12</sup> likewise the devil,<sup>13</sup> but the context in both passages annotated places beyond cavil that the concepts of authorship were not confused. The devil is mentioned as the author of sin in contra-distinction to God. The spirit of man is responsible for sin in opposition to the flesh of man.<sup>14</sup> The difficulty proper as to what the devil contributes to sin and what man is to be held responsible for, in Tertullian's opinion, may be solved by the consideration that the devil is the author of temptation, at least, in some instances, and man is the author of the consent whereby the transition is made from temptation to sin.<sup>15</sup>

The agencies that contribute immediately to temptation are discussed at length by Tertullian in several works. Practically all his ascetico-moral writings deal in some places expressly of the subject matter that forms the substance of temptations, such as sensual fascination, seductive ornamentation, professions or positions harm-

<sup>12</sup> "Adv. Marc." II, 28.

<sup>13</sup> "Adv. Marc." II, c. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

ful to faith or morals, pagan pleasures, and inter-marriage with non-Christians. It may be worthy of notice here that Tertullian drew no marked line of distinction between occasion and temptation to sin.

The source of temptation which Tertullian treats most extensively is that of sensuality. His detailed exposition of this basis of temptation is worthy of serious consideration from a theoretical standpoint because of the comparison of his standards with those of present day theologians, as well as from a practical standpoint because of the educative value for the proper adjudgement of questions relating to standards or principles that have no tangible constancy in everyday life. Sensuality, if we may comprehend thereby sensual or carnal promptings, is admittedly a subject of great consequence in practical morality. The question of consent or refusal of consent to carnal promptings is of vast import to the practical moralist, to the directive asceticist, and to the conscience that seeks enlightenment on the difficulties usually concomitant with the border line conflicts between the sensual and spiritual. The manner in which Tertullian treats of the nature of temptation arising from this source cannot but be helpful also to the morality theorist who would not merely draw his conclusions as to carnal temptations from principles valid in other spheres of morality (e. g. pride, avarice, culpability and gravity thereof, also strength of temptations), but also construct his principles after making observations of the ordinary occurrences in the development of such carnal temptations (e. g. passion, weakness, occasion, proximate and remote). Tertullian's treatment of the various subjects of carnal temptations, reflect of course his concept of sexual sin and, *consideratis considerandis*, the concept his fellow Christians had thereof.

As has been stated above, in weighing Tertullian's moral opinions due allowance must be made for his rigorism, and in trying to construct his concept of sin from his treatment of the origin of sin due consideration must be had for standards, the relativity of which is

obviously necessitated by times and temperament. The views of the present day moralist on propriety in dress, could not be squared with Tertullian's, except along the vague lines of a highly generalized principle.<sup>16</sup>

For a virgin to go about unveiled, would expose her and those she meets to temptation.<sup>17</sup> Virginitv for self protection should avoid even female eyes. The angels fell because of the unveiled virgin, is Tertullian's clam,<sup>18</sup> which he bases on Gen. VI, 1, 2. "Seeing and being seen belong to the self-same lust."<sup>19</sup> This severity concerning the unveiled virgin in the presence of women has most probably the meaning that she should avoid envy, talk, and suspicion concerning her good character. Even the desire to go about unveiled is considered immodest, for non-concealment is plainly "a study to please men."<sup>20</sup> By the veil Tertullian understands a cover for the whole head, reaching down to the robe or outer cloak of the woman.<sup>21</sup> The neck should be encircled and hidden. From one part of the context it would appear that the veil did not cover the face,<sup>22</sup> but other passages give sufficient proof that nothing of the head or the neck was to be seen.<sup>23</sup>

Tertullian, seeking to ward off criticism of his apparently uncalled for strictness, claims that his views are founded on revelations.<sup>24</sup> The very severity of a shrouded, morose face should break any evil thought. That the Christian women were not convinced however of the necessity of so strict a discipline is evident not merely from the general purpose of the special treatise *Virg. Vel.*, but also from the quite explicit accusation that some, amid the psalms and at the mention of God's

16 "Virg. Vel." "Cult. Fem." passim.

17 "Virg. Vel." 15.

18 "Virg. Vel." 7.

19 "Virg. Vel." 2.

20 "Virg. Vel." 14.

21 "Virg. Vel." 17.

22 Ibid.

23 "Virg. Vel." 16.—Married women, too, are admonished to follow the discipline of the veil. "Virg. Vel." 17.

24 Ibid.



name, remain uncovered, and some, at the time of prayer, "place a fringe or a tuft or any thread whatever on the crown of their heads" to meet the dead letter of the discipline.<sup>25</sup> Mothers, sisters and virgin daughters are asked to observe the discipline of the veil. "All ages are imperilled in your person."<sup>26</sup> The discipline should be observed in the church and on the street.<sup>27</sup>

While the motive underlying this rigorism of Tertullian was to some extent due to his general tendency of trying to fulfill the letter of the law in an abundance of spirit, and while the *Virg. Vel.* belongs to his Semi-Montanistic period, or at least to the transition time from orthodox Catholicism to Semi-Montanism, we can see in the interpretation of the veil discipline the determination of this most ardent defender of the angelic virtue.

If Tertullian's treatise *Virg. Vel.* leaves us too uncertain as to his fellow-Christians' views on temptations to carnal sin because of Semi-Montanistic rigorism, his Catholic works *De Cultu Feminarum* and *Ad Uxorem* ought to be a considerably safe measure of his opinion. Ornamentation, consisting in the care of the hair, of the skin, and of those parts of the body which attract the eye, is equivalent to prostitution.<sup>28</sup> This charge, obviously an oratorical exaggeration, is tempered with a remark that would tend to mitigate the rhetorical outburst, but Tertullian evidently wishes it to stand in full force for many of his readers or hearers. Most women, he claims,—and here we easily deduce from the context that he means the women of his Christian audience,<sup>29</sup>—live as if modesty meant merely the integrity of the flesh, that is, abstinence from fornication.<sup>30</sup> The accusation is rather grave and comprehensive both as to its substance and to the number of persons accused. One cannot imagine that with all the perfection so frequent-

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Virg. Vel." 16.

<sup>27</sup> "Virg. Vel." 13.

<sup>28</sup> "Cult. Fem." I, c. 4.

<sup>29</sup> "Cult. Fem." II, c. 1.

<sup>30</sup> "Cult. Fem." I, c. 2.

ly and thoroughly predicated of the early Christians there were so widespread an "ignorance" or "dissimulation"<sup>31</sup> as to the virtue of modesty and the observance of such proprieties in external appearance as have recognized connection therewith. That the views of most Christian women as to the virtue of modesty were so broad as Tertullian plainly stated, either cannot be accepted as a statement of fact and consequently must be stamped a Tertullianic overstatement, or must be interpreted in the sense that, with some allowance for the exaggeration as to the substance of the accusation, the generally adopted attitude of a large number of Christian women on the propriety of dress and ornamentation was not reprehensible nor dictated by an idealist.

Tertullian's rigorism as to the sense of propriety is perhaps attributable to his lack of distinguishing between absolute and relative susceptibility to temptation. While this distinction seems to be a primary postulate of the practical moral sense, we are not aware that it found its way into Tertullian's quite complete concept of sin and its accessories. That we would be justified in expecting to find such a distinction is a logical inference from the nicety of distinction applied in describing Gentile modesty, which in some persons is not willing to give way to sin yet not quite willing to refuse consent.<sup>32</sup>

Speaking in summary propositions, Tertullian stresses that studied personal grace as a means of pleasing, sensually, of course,<sup>33</sup> does not spring from a sound conscience. The statement made is that Christian modesty condemns as sinful such studied attractiveness, and the palpable implication is that such attractiveness does not excite to lust. Tertullian does not accentuate here the intention which would make the studied gracefulness an evil independently of its possible or real tempting quality. And the intention is admittedly the one absolute factor in questions concerning standards or ideals of mod-

31 "Cult. Fem." I, c. 1.

32 "Cult. Fem." II, c. 1.

33 Ibid. c. 2.

esty which are undoubtedly to some extent a matter of relativity.

Even natural grace must be concealed and neglected because of its power to excite temptation. Tertullian senses however the difficulty which lies in the consideration that natural homeliness, "an additional outlay of the divine plastic art" cannot be condemned. If studied grace is but an imitation of natural beauty, it were impossible to see any wrong in the imitation, if we abstract from intention. A rather unsatisfactory solution is given by Tertullian, for he says that natural beauty though not to be censured is still to be feared,<sup>34</sup> on account of the injuriousness and the violence of "suitors". Temptation against chastity as such is not considered as an evil which might follow from permitting natural beauty in external appearance to show itself to the "glances of eyes."<sup>35</sup>

With all the assertiveness in his views on natural beauty and temptation, Tertullian seems to admit the possibility of a different view. According to him the use and fruit of beauty is voluptuousness. In supporting his view however he apparently shifts to more tenable ground, and speaks of women who augment natural beauty or "strive after it when not given."<sup>36</sup> For the sake of argument he admits the alternative, pride or "glory in the flesh." For such a glory he sees no justification, except when the flesh "has been lacerated for the sake of Christ." He concludes his argumentation by repeating his advice to women who are gifted with natural beauty: *Non adiuvare, sed impedire.*<sup>37</sup>

It would be interesting to see the analytical mind of Tertullian meet these problems concerning sexual temptations in a cool argumentative way and not by the method of rhetorical exaggeration. That many Christians measured these problems from a different angle than did

34 Ibid.

35 "Cult. Fem." II, c. 2.

36 Ibid., c. 3.

37 Ibid.



their leader Tertullian, is quite conclusively demonstrable from the insistence with which he preached modesty, then, too, from his Montanistic dispute with the Psychics on the remissibility of sexual sins.

By way of diversion Tertullian treats at greater length than would a modern morality textbook of the doubt as to the permissibility of studied comeliness on the part of married women. Their plea of pleasing the husbands is not sufficient to depart from the principle that modesty must be preserved at all costs. The Christian husbands are not captivated by beauty "because we are not captivated by the same graces" as the Gentiles.<sup>38</sup> A non-Christian husband will regard with suspicion any attempt at pleasing, he does not believe in beauty on the part of a Christian wife unless it be artless.

It might be of interest to consider the manner in which Tertullian applies his general principles, if we may call them such, when treating in detail of the question of ornamentation. The question was as live a one in the days of Tertullian as in ours because of its vital connection with difficulties in determining the permissible and the non-permissible in matters sensual.

Dyeing the hair is an act of temerity, spoiling "the opportunity of sobriety." To put the hair up in various studied ways is against the command "be veiled."<sup>39</sup> Good simplicity should be the guiding rule. No plain reference is made to any other reason for observing simplicity than that of avoiding waste of time. These same remarks on the arrangement of the hair hold for man. In him, too, by a defective nature is implanted the desire to please those of the other sex.<sup>40</sup> As to clothing and the other *impedimenta compositionis* too redundant splendor must be avoided. "Meretricious and prostituting garbs and garments" must not be used, and by such garbs and garments he understands the clothing

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., c. 4.

<sup>39</sup> "Cult. Fem." II, c. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

that supports or supplies natural beauty. An exception in the use of "gorgeous array" is admitted for people who because of riches, birth, or position are compelled to appear richly ornamented in public. This exception is merely a matter of tolerance. Those concerned are asked to temper "an evil of this kind."<sup>41</sup>

Tertullian apparently quotes a definition of scandal which almost coincides with the one usually given by authors of moral theology: *Scandalum est dictum vel factum minus rectum praebens alicui occasionem ruinae spiritualis*. Tertullian's version of it is: *Scandalum nisi fallor, non bonae rei, sed malae exemplum est, aedificans ad delictum*.<sup>42</sup> We could not expect much exactness in the explanation of this definition since it is quite incidental to the subject matter treated. "Good things scandalize none but the evil mind."<sup>43</sup> The context demonstrates that by good things are meant virtues, such as modesty, contempt of glory, and points to what would now be called *Scandalum pharisaicum*. The concept of temptation to sin as we have shown it to have existed in the mind of Tertullian contains much that pertains to scandal, since scandal is temptation as existing in the cause.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., c. 9.

<sup>42</sup> "Virg. Vel." 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER XI.

## VARIOUS VIEWS ON TERTULLIAN'S DIVISIONS OF SIN.

The following pages are devoted to a brief summary of the views non-Catholic and Catholic authors have propounded on the concept of grievous and light sin in the works of Tertullian. As will be seen, we mention merely the more important writers on the subject. It would be of no avail to summarize the articles in the various theological reviews that have mentioned the Tertullianic concept of personal sin, grievous and venial. To our knowledge the subject has been treated merely in connection with other aspects of sin, principally the remissibility or non-remissibility of sin. The real content of the concept of the distinction between mortal and venial sin has been set aside as foreign to the discussions of other aspects, as by Catholic authors, or the distinction, as it existed in accordance with Catholic doctrine has been simply denied, as by non-Catholic authors.

Preuschen<sup>1</sup> treats the subject of personal sin and the distinction between sins of various degrees as presented in the two works, *De Paenitentia* and *De Pudicitia*. The work *Paen.* shows no distinction between remissible and irremissible sin.<sup>2</sup> It is evident from Preuschen's chapter on sins in the work referred to that his scope does not comprise venial sin.<sup>3</sup> A relative gravity of sins however existed. But the faithful had not as yet applied the biblical concept of mortal sin—presumably the one of I

1 "Tertullian's Schriften de paenitentia und de pudicitia mit Ruecksicht auf die Bussdisziplin." Giessen, 1890.

2 Preuschen uses the term *laesslich* for remissible and *nicht-laesslich* for irremissible. In Catholic theology the German word *laesslich* corresponds to our English term venial.

3 The *delicta cotidiana* of "Pud." 19 are considered as grave in content. Preuschen, *op. cit.*, p. 22.



John V, 16—to any sins. Thus Preuschen.<sup>4</sup> For the present we would call attention to the fact that Tertullian alone gave I John V. 16, that peculiar concept of irremissible mortal sexual sin. There is no argument from Tertullian's text to show that the Christians of his time had a concept that corresponded to the one constructed by him on the text mentioned. In fact, the method of argumentation of Tertullian in *Pud.* 19 relative to I John V, 16, as we shall show later, is so forced that it were not at all rash to assume that the faithful or even the admirers of Tertullian did not accept his exegesis of this scriptural passage.

Kohler in his article on Catholicism<sup>5</sup> considers mortal sin the equivalent of capital sin or principal sin, a terminology that finds its counterpart perhaps its origin, according to him, in Tertullian's works. Incidentally, the article misrepresents the Catholic distinction between mortal and venial sin.

Holl in his article on Busswesen<sup>6</sup> considers mortal sin in the first century as opposed to sins committed in ignorance. This concept, Holl claims, developed from the realization that sin existed in Christianity despite the absolute command that the faithful remain free from all sin and preserve their baptismal seal pure and unbroken. He quotes II *Clem.* VI, 9, VIII, 6, *Ignatius ad Polycarpum* VI, 2, *Hermas mand.* IV, 1, 8, and III, 1, to show the idealistic concept the early Christian had of perfection especially in its negative phase, i. e., refraining from all sin. His references to I *Cor.* 5 *Did.* IV, *Did.* XIV, 1,

4 Preuschen's division of sins as enumerated by Tertullian displeases Rolffs to some extent (*Tu.* XI), who contends that Tertullian's division of sins (*Pud.* 2 and 21) into those against God and those against the neighbor was made merely to interpret: *dimitte et dimittetur tibi*. Rolffs rightly calls attention to the fact that sins against a fellow being are also sins against God. He consequently takes exception to Preuschen's conclusion: the remission of sins against a fellow being through him is a complete one and hence needs not the approval of God, i. e. through the organs of the *Geistesgemeinde*.

5 "Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart," Vol. III, col. 1035, 3rd ed., Tuebingen, 1912.

6 "Die Religion," etc., Vol. I, coll. 1462, 1463. Cf. "Apoc." XXII, 15.

*James V*, 16, disprove his statements that the first Christians had no concept of penance after baptism, that is, a second baptism, and consequently, as he implies, no concept of mortal or venial sin. The realization that sin existed among the Christians brought forth, he claims, an effort to conciliate the idealistic view with actual facts. Hence the distinction between sins of ignorance and mortal sins (mortal here not in the Catholic sense but in the alleged sense of *I John V*, 16 and *I Clem. II*, 3).

Another means to conciliate the ideal and the real in Christian life was, he claims, the establishing of a higher ideal and a lower ideal, which latter was adapted to the average Christian. Holl refers in a general way to *Did.*, to *II Clem.* and to *Hermas*. It should be noted that he refers to *II Clem.* and *Hermas* in his effort to prove the statement that the first Christian knew nothing of the necessity of such a conciliation, namely, between the ideal and the real. To quote the same sources for contradictory concepts without any further limitation or explanation is unfair in the author and misleading to the reader who presupposes impartial investigation and honest statement of results. Then, presumably, in the time of Tertullian, (no special references are given by Holl,) the concept of mortal sin was narrowed down to "the three gravest sinful deeds", idolatry, murder, adultery. From the content of the article, mortal sins are apparently considered as irremissible. *Peccata graviora* are also mentioned by Holl as belonging to the time of Tertullian. They were not however of the same gravity, he claims, as the three irremissible sins. No statement is made as to what concept of sinfulness the *peccata graviora* represented. Lighter sins are mentioned incidentally but without any reference to their conceptual content.

Rolffs calls attention<sup>7</sup> to the contradictory enumeration of sins made by Tertullian in *Pud.* c. 2 and c. 19, namely in c. 2 remissible sins i. e. after a period of penance and

7 "Das Indulgenz-Edikt des Papstes Callixtus," "Tu." Vol. II, pp. 41 sqq.

irremissible sins i. e. those for which there existed no ecclesiastical pardon. The latter comprehended murder, idolatry and adultery. To the former class belonged all other sins. In *Pud.* c. 19 he finds Tertullian mentioning homicide, idolatry, deceit, denial, blasphemy, adultery and fornication and other violations of the temple of God as the same "mortal" sins enumerated by Tertullian in *Adv. Marc.* IV, 9, as *delicta capitalia* with "one" modification: *falsum testimonium* for *negatio* (also *moechia* for *adulterium* and *stuprum* for *fornicatio*). The outstanding feature of these mortal sins is that they are committed against God or His temple. Rolffs considers "temple" here equivalent to the Christian community. May we not suppose that Tertullian is interpreting *templum* in matters of chastity according to the Pauline concept i. e. the body of the individual? And then *homicidium*, *adulterium* and *stuprum* are primarily and immediately sins against the body<sup>8</sup>. In the same chapter (i. e. *Adv. Marc.* IV, 9), *templum* is used in comparison with *ecclesia*.<sup>9</sup> There is surely no conclusive evidence from this comparison that *templum dei* meant the "congregation" and not the body.

Rolffs considers the attempt to conciliate the two apparently contradictory passages from Tertullian's *Pud.* c. 2 and c. 19 as useless and vain. The two classifications are viewed by Tertullian from two different angles. In c. 2 Tertullian wishes to show that the practice of the Church to forgive certain sins after sufficient penance and to censure others with life long excommunication was in harmony with Scripture. In the other chapter Tertullian tries to conciliate I *John* 1, 8 and III, 9 by his explanation of I *John* V, 16, as concerning the irremissible and the remissible sins. The latter, Rolffs claims, were of no practical import to Tertullian since the

8 D'Alès, "La Théol. de Tert." p. 274. "L'Edit de Call." p. 209. D'Alès refers to "Ep. Barn." 4, 11, "Ign. Ad Philad." 7, 2, II "Clem." 9, 3, "Cult. Fem." 2, 1

9 "Anf." calls this the first use of the word *ecclesia* in the sense of church.



Church discipline at his time was not concerned with the sins of everyday life.

The three classes of sin in *Pud.* (Rolffs is not concerned with classifications of sin given in any other work of Tertullian,) are 1) daily sins of no further import for the question of penance, 2) sins which can be remitted after public penance, 3) "mortal" sins that exclude forever from the Christian community, namely the sins of murder, idolatry and adultery. (As already indicated above, "mortal" here has not the meaning which Catholic theology attaches to the term.) Rolffs calls the first class *Fehltritte*, the second *Vergehen*, the third *Todsünden*.<sup>10</sup> The second group is not divided from the other two by a well-marked line.<sup>11</sup> A definite rule whereby the sins of the first class can be definitely and safely distinguished from those of the second cannot be established. This is evident according to Rolffs. The reasons he gives are as follows: Difficulty of distinguishing safely between *facile maledicere* and *blasphemia*, *fidem pacti destruere* and *fraus*, *temere iurare* and *necessitate mentiri* and false witnessing. Every blasphemy, he says, can become a *negatio*. Also, *idololatria*, *moechia*, *fornicatio* and *homicidium* are changing concepts. He refers to the treatise *De Idololatria* to show how varied the application of the concept of idolatry was in theory and in practice. The concept of homicide is more definite than that of idolatry, that of *moechia* and *fornicatio* more exact than the concept of murder.<sup>12</sup>

Recapitulating the remissible sins, Rolffs states that they comprise sins that are committed against God or constitute a violation of the temple of God, or cause public scandal, then too, the sins of everyday life if they give public scandal, even the mildest forms of idolatry and of murder. *Fornicatio* and *moechia* always belong to the irremissible sins. It is difficult to understand Rolffs' method of interpretation of Tertullian's various classes of

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rolffs, op. cit., p. 46, note 2; Preuschen, op. cit., pp. 34 sqq.

<sup>11</sup> Loc. cit. p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> "Pud." 22, "Cyprian Ep." 55, c. 26.

sin in *Pud.* If more references had been given in support of his statements his investigation would have undoubtedly gained in value.

Windisch<sup>13</sup> finds in Tertullian's work *Paen.* no reference to lesser and greater sins. Penance is necessary for all kinds of sin. Sins of thought and deed alike are to be avoided or atoned for. Referring to *Pud.* 19, Windisch finds Tertullian writing on *laessliche Suenden*. He considers Tertullian's explanation of I *John* V, 16, I *John* III, 3 to 8 and I *John* 1, 8, as correct in practice, perhaps even necessary, but not in harmony with the original meaning of the texts quoted, that is, not according to the exposition he (Windisch) has given.<sup>14</sup> What corresponds objectively to the concept of mortal sin in the mind of Tertullian, he does not state, but in the use of the terms *Todsuende* and *Laessliche Suende* he seems to follow other non-Catholic writers (Preuschen and Rolffs.)

Worman<sup>15</sup> asserts that Protestants, like the Christians of the Apostolic and Patristic age, distinguish between *peccata graviora* and *leviora*. The early Christians, he claims, knew nothing of venial sins. Their concept of venial and mortal sins meant nothing more, at least according to the passages in which these terms occur, than the requirement or non-requirement of penance. His statements refer, presumably, also to the time and the works of Tertullian.

Lea in his *History of Confession and Indulgences*<sup>16</sup> writes: "The Montanist rigor of Tertullian, on the strength of the text I *John* V, 16, divided sins into remissible and irremissible." "St. Augustine seems to be the first to take note of venial sins."

<sup>13</sup> Windisch, "Taufe und Busse bei Tertullian," p. 417, Tuebingen, 1908.

<sup>14</sup> This exposition, given principally on page 271, states in effect that St. John considers the sin of a Christian a problem and distinguishes between light and grievous sins, which distinction W. claims natural, as it was taken over, according to W., from Judaism. Tertullian, according to W., knows no advice as to mortal sins.

<sup>15</sup> "Cyclop. of Bibl. Theol. and Eccl. Literature," Vol. VI, p. 658, New York, 1876.

<sup>16</sup> Vol. II, p. 235' Philadelphia' 1896.

Catholic authors enumerate the various divisions of sins as given by Tertullian and according to their view and purpose place them in various classes. Esser<sup>17</sup> gives the following classification of the sins mentioned in *Pud.* 1) *Capitalia seu mortalia quia irremissibilia*, such that exclude for life from the Church. 2) Such sins that exclude *ad tempus* from the Church, *remissibilia, delicta leviora* or *modica*, *Pud.* c. 7 and perhaps c. 19. 3) Sins that are of so small importance that they are remitted immediately without any public penance. These sins Tertullian compares with the little drachma.<sup>18</sup> 4) *Monstra, non sunt delicta*. We would not consider the *peccata mediocria* as immediately remissible from *Pud.* 19. The very rigorism of Tertullian's Montanistic views would seem to militate against the assumption that sins as grievous as *mediocria* could in all instances be remitted without an intermediary agency.

D'Alès is much more explicit in his treatise *La Théol. de Tert.* on the concept of sin in the works of Tertullian. He devotes several pages to the consideration of this topic and sums up his research with the following enumeration of Tertullian's Montanistic classification of sin: 1) Venial faults which do not incur canonical punishment.<sup>19</sup> He calls attention to the fact that "venial" has not the meaning in Tertullian's theology that it has in later periods. 2) Graver faults, subject to penance, remissible through the ministry of the bishop, such as

17 "Die Busschriften Tertullians' De Paenitentia und de Pudicitia und das Indulgenzdekret des Papstes Kallistus." Programme of the University of Bonn, 1905, p. 16, footnote.

18 "Pud." c. 7. We would not want to assert that this distinction is Tertullian's. He is undoubtedly quoting a real or supposed adversary and in the course of the quotation is merely stating a possible concept of what the drachma represents. It is not evident, from the concept, that sins of moderate character, which are compared with the drachma, are remitted immediately without any public penance. The contrary seems to be more likely since the adversary quoted tries to bring even adultery and fornication into comparison with the drachma. Tertullian objects that the comparison is forced. The adulterers and fornicators according to Tert. are to be compared with a talent.

19 D'Alès' op. cit., p. 275.



sins committed through frailty<sup>20</sup> 3) Mortal and irremissible sin, namely, idolatry, impurity, homicide. D'Alès does not enter into the question as to whether Tertullian had a precise concept of mortal and venial sin. The nearest he approaches to the question is in a statement referred to in a footnote concerning the term venial. In his later work, *L'Edit de Calliste*, he treats at considerable length<sup>21</sup> of Tertullian's doctrines concerning the irremissible sins. Sin as committed directly against God receives a brief but clear exposition.<sup>22</sup> Although we do not find any discourse on the distinction between mortal and venial sin in the works of D'Alès, we see nowhere the conclusion even insinuated that Tertullian held a heretical view concerning the distinction.

Rauschen<sup>23</sup> speaks of the concept of mortal and venial sin in several passages of his excellent work *Eucharist and Penance*. He seems to imply that in the early Church *mortal* and *capital* were convertible terms.<sup>24</sup> He states that the definition of mortal sin was not everywhere the same.<sup>25</sup> He had perhaps in mind the practical application of the concept among the faithful. Schanz is quoted as saying:<sup>26</sup> "The distinction between *peccata venialia* and *mortalia* had not yet been exactly determined." Presumably the practical distinction is meant. In the retrospect of his treatise on penance Rauschen writes

20 Ibid. Fautes plus graves, encourageant une pénitence plus ou moins rigoureuse, d'ailleurs rémissibles par le ministère de l'évêque: ce sont des fautes de fragilité, auxquelles nul n'échappe entièrement. We confess surprise at this statement of D'Alès. We fail to find any text in Tertullian that would serve as a basis for the opinion of D'Alès. If such offenses were unavoidable, and if every Christian at some period of life lost the grace of God by committing one or more of these *peccata graviora*, Tertullian's view of Christian perfection must have been contradictorily opposite to the view of perfection implied in his explanation of penance.

21 "L'Edit de Calliste," pp. 197-208.

22 Op. cit., pp. 208 sqq.

23 Op. cit., Eng. transl. of 2nd Germ. ed., Freiburg (Baden), 1913.

24 Op. cit., p. 189.

25 Op. cit., p. 234.

26 "Die Lehre v. d. hl. Sakr.," p. 575.

that some authors narrowed the concept of mortal sin, others widened it.<sup>27</sup>

Bruders<sup>28</sup> claims that early Christianity in practice made a clear distinction between venial and grievous sin. He adduces the following text from Tertullian among the proofs for his statement: *Quod sint quaedam delicta cotidianae incursionis, quibus omnes simus obiecti. Si nulla sit venia istorum, nemini salus competat.* Pud. 19. We are quite confident Bruders does not consider the passage in itself as a conclusive support of the Catholic distinction between mortal and venial sin. No Catholic dogmatician, to our knowledge, has tried to prove the existence of the distinction in early Christianity by the *peccata cotidiana* of Tertullian<sup>29</sup>

Waldmann<sup>30</sup> seems to imply that "the rigorists and idealists in all times since Tertullian" have denied with more reason than the Stoics the existence of light sins.

From the foregoing review of non-Catholic and Catholic authors, who have directly or indirectly touched upon the concept of personal sin, mortal or venial, as it probably existed in the time of Tertullian, we gain the impression that the subject is a settled matter for non-Catholics, while Catholic authors either hesitate to attack the subject or insinuate that the denial of a distinction between mortal and venial sin finds no basis in the work of Tertullian or other early documents.

Since the writings of Tertullian treat of sin at greater length than any of the early Christian authors we have thus far considered, (in fact more than all together) it is quite natural that we should devote more consideration to his disquisition on the concept of personal sin. His writings may be considered the most decisive on the subject in question, not merely because of the strong grasp his mind had on most subjects that pertained to morality, but also because of his lengthy and

<sup>27</sup> "Eucharist and Penance" p. 251.

<sup>28</sup> "Zkt." p. 527 sq., 1910.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. "Kirchenlexikon" (Herder's), p. 955, Vol. XI, 2nd ed.—Also "Cath. Encycl." Vol. XIV, art. on Sin, pp. 4 sqq.

<sup>30</sup> "Tq." p. 156, 1917-18.

detailed discussions of certain aspects of sin. We do not think it an exaggeration to state that the finer points of theology left untouched by Tertullian were not brought out until the master intellects, St. Augustine, Peter the Lombard, and St. Thomas, gave them attention. The mind of Tertullian dominated the ascetico-moral field of theology at least in the Occident. The explicit or implicit teaching of Tertullian concerning mortal sin or what may be construed as his view thereon, his interpretation of the doctrinal concept of "light" sin must therefore be of supreme importance in establishing the view of early Christianity on a matter so far reaching as the distinction between mortal and venial sin.



## CHAPTER XII.

"MORTAL" AND ALLEGED SYNONYMS IN  
TERTULLIAN'S WORKS.

Some preparatory light on the important subject of a distinction between mortal and venial sin comes to us from a precise understanding of the content and extent of the term "capital" as used in connection with sin. Because of the admittedly indefinite contents of terms in general during the embryonic state of theological terminology, the assigning of synonymic concepts to any terms of that period should be cautiously attempted.

In no text of Tertullian do we find *capital* substituted for *mortal*. If it is certain that *capital* and *mortal* sins are alike irremissible there would still be no convincing comparison of contexts that would force us to consider the terms as wholly equivalent.<sup>1</sup> The texts from which the irremissibility of mortal and capital sins could be deduced and which at first glance favor the assumption that *capital* and *mortal* are synonymous terms follow here: *Quis enim dimittit delicta, nisi solus Deus? et utique mortalia quae in ipsum fuerint admissa, et in templum ejus. Pud. XXI, 2 (de Labriolle p. 192). Adeo nihil ad delicta fidelium capitalia potestas solvendi et alligandi Petro emancipata. Cui si praeceperat Dominus etiam septuagies septies delinquenti in eum fratri indulgere, utique nihil postea alligare, id est retinere, mandasset, nisi forte ea quae in Dominum, non in fratrem quis admiserit. Praejudicatur enim non dimittenda in Deum delicta, cum in homine admissa donantur. Pud. XXI, 14, 15 (de Labriolle pp. 196, 198.) Ita nihil jam superest, quam aut neget moechiam et fornicationem mortalia esse delicta, aut irremissibilia fatearis, pro quibus nec exorare permittitur. Pud. XIX, 28 (de Labriolle p. 184.) Ceterum si etc. ut moechiam et fornicationem*

<sup>1</sup> We abstract here from the fact that Tertullian was in his Montanistic period when he presumably or, perhaps, really made the terms mortal and capital synonymous with irremissible.

*paenitentia donent, aut et cetera delicta pariter capitalia concedi oportebit, aut paria quoque eorum moechiam et fornicationem inconcessibilia servari. Pud. IX, 20. (de-Labriolle pp. 106, 108).*

The difficulty alone of interpreting the texts correctly, not to speak of the consideration due to the Montanistic attitude of Tertullian, argue against considering the synonymic contents of *capital* and *mortal* as settled beyond dispute. In the first text adduced above does Tertullian wish to give a definition of mortal sin by the relative clause: *quae in ipsum fuerint admissa, et in templum ejus?* Or is the clause merely explanatory? What could substantiate the statement that sins *in fratrem* were not among the *mortalia*? In point of fact, *fraus* is mentioned in *Pud. 19* as among those sins that God alone can remit. If the *mortalia* are to be considered as *irremissibilia* and the *irremissibilia* as *mortalia*, the enumeration of *fraus* in *Pud. 19* would place a serious difficulty in the way of understanding the clause mentioned above as a definition. If the clause however is to be interpreted as merely explanatory and consequently not as comprehensive (that is, not enumerating all the groups of sins to be considered mortal) the text cannot be used in connection with *Pud. 21 Adeo nihil ad* etc. to establish the synonymic concept of *mortal* and *capital*.

The uncertainty as to the meaning and support of the first text adduced with reference to the synonymic use of the two terms in question leaves us in doubt at least as to the value of the remaining texts, since in these there is the possibility of finding a synonymic concept, only by means of the term *irremissibile* or its equivalent, *inconcessibile*,<sup>2</sup> that is, by the indirect method of outlining the concept through the comparison of two terms with a

<sup>2</sup> "Pud." 21: Adeo nihil, etc., will upon close inspection prove to contain an example of the method Tertullian applied in over-riding or minimizing an obvious objection from Scripture. "Math." XVI, 19, which treats of the power of binding and loosing, is dismissed lightly with the explanation that sins against God are to be retained, sins against the neighbor are to be remitted. "Pud." 21 Cui (Petro) si praeceperat Dominus, etc.

third. The text, *Pud.* 19 *Ita nihil* etc., would seem to make *irremissible* and *mortal* convertible terms. They could perhaps be considered such, but only in the light of the interpretation which Tertullian puts on certain texts from St. John's first letter, an interpretation which a careful reading of the complete chapter *Pud.* 19 will show to be forced and distorted to the support of Tertullian's viewpoint.<sup>3</sup>

The text from *Pud.* 9, *Ceterum si* etc., could establish the synonymic nature of *mortal* and *capital* only in connection with one of the passages we have been considering. If from Tertullian's method of argumentation in *Pud.* 19 it were to be concluded that only impurity is the "sin unto death", then other crimes that are equally *capital* (*pariter capitalia*) are not *ad mortem*, although *inconcussibilia*.

One conclusion seems positive from the brief consideration we have given the possibility of the synonymic relation between *capital* and *mortal* in Tertullian and that may be summed up thus: The relation of *capital* and *mortal* is by no means a definite matter, the terms cannot be considered perfectly equivalent, and their contents must be determined in the individual passages where they occur. The relative value of the terms, *capital* and *mortal* with reference to passages that speak of *delicta irremissibilia* cannot be considered a settled ques-

3 Tertullian devotes the greater part of "Pud." 19 to explaining, from his own viewpoint, the texts which the Psychics brought forth, presumably in support of the edict of Callixtus, e. g., I "John" I, 7: *sanguis filii ejus emundat nos ab omni delicto*. To this text Tertullian replies with a specious distinction: *Numquid ab immunditia?* (This reply he gives primarily to "John" I, 8, but it applies also to I "John" I, 7). He is apparently unmindful that his distinction is nullified by a text which he adduces later on in the same chapter: *Omnis qui facit justiam, justus est, sicut et ille justus est. Qui facit delictum, ex diabolo est*. I "John" III, 7, 8. Tertullian uses in quoting I "John" III, 3, *castificat* for *sanctificat* and *castus* for *sanctus*. The last part of "Pud." 19, beginning with *Ita Joannis ratio constabit deversitatis*, etc., deals expressly with the text of I "John" V, 16, 17, concerning the sin that is unto death and the sin that is not unto death. Fornication and adultery must, according to Tertullian's reasoning, be considered as the sins *ad mortem*, for the remission of which one may not even offer prayer.



tion since *irremissible*, *mortal* and *capital* are not demonstrably convertible terms. Even if we were to concede that the Montanistic *De Pudicitia* did use the terms synonymously we merely would be granting that Tertullian gave the terms rigoristic limits which they did not possess in Psychic thought, as may be deduced from Tertullian's tangible effort to reconstruct their meaning.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that the number of capital sins is not the same in the passages in which Tertullian enumerates them, *Adv. Marc.* IV, 9 and *Pud.* 19. D'Alès<sup>5</sup> and Adam<sup>6</sup> call special attention to this fact. The latter sees in the expansion of the four categories of sins (adultery, homicide, idolatry, deceit<sup>7</sup>) to the seven of Tertullian's Montanistic period (Semi-Montanistic according to D'Alès) and later in *Pud.* to a number that included *negatio* and sins in general against the temple of God, a sufficient proof of the inconstancy of the number of capital sins, at least in the day of Tertullian.

The text of *Adv. Marc.* IV, 9, *septem maculis capitalium delictorem* etc., has been interpreted as meaning the seven capital sins. This interpretation seems the most obvious. There is hardly any probability that Tertullian had in mind to say: *septem maculae quae proveniunt ex delictis capitalibus*. The one important objection to such an interpretation lies in the very text itself. Idolatry,

4 With reference to the passage "Pud." 21 Adeo nihil, which mentions the sins in dominum in contra-distinction to those in fratrem, it may be well worth recalling that this classification adds another element of uncertainty to fixing the conceptual content of mortal and capital.—Harnack states in "Dogmengesch." I, 3rd ed., p. 407: Die Unterscheidung von solchen Sünden, die wider Gott selbst begangen sind, wie sie sich bei Tertullian, Cyprian und anderen Vaetern findet, bleibt mit einer Unklarheit behaftet, die ich nicht zu lichten vermag. Esser tries to throw some light on this difficulty of Harnack by calling attention to the sins that are directly against God and to the sins that are directly against the neighbor. Between the two, he places the sins against the temple of God: ("Die Busschriften Tertullians," etc., p. 16). The mere statement of Tertullian's division of sins does not, of course, solve the difficulty.—D'Alès, "L'Édit. de Call." p. 211 sq.

5 "L'Édit de Call." p. 205 sq.

6 "Der Kirchenbegriff Tert's" in "Forschungen z. christl. Literatur u. Dogmengesch.," VI 4 Heft Paderborn, 1909.

7 Cf. "Bapt." 4, "Idol." 1, "Paen." 7.

murder and adultery would then also flow forth from the capital sins, which title however they justly claim above all other crimes. Still this objection will find a quite ready reply in Tertullian's treatise on Idolatry c. 1. There Tertullian strives to show the source relation between idolatry and the sins of murder, adultery, fornication, fraud, etc. A mutual source-relation, therefore, between the so-called capital sins, adultery, murder and idolatry, was perhaps before the mind of Tertullian. At least, it cannot be said with certainty that Tertullian wished to constitute seven as the number of capital sins.

The text in which the enumeration occurs is quite obscure.<sup>8</sup> In the strikingly similar passage of *Pud.* 19 we find no reference to the passage from *Adv. Marc.* IV, 9.<sup>9</sup> From a comparison of the two passages we would not be inclined to believe that Tertullian attached any value in

8 Si autem Helisaeus prophetae creatoris unicum leprosum Naaman Syrum ex tot leprosis Israelitis emundavit, nec hoc ad diversitatem facit Christi, quasi hoc modo melioris, dum Israeliten leprosum emundat extraneus, quem suus dominus emundare non valuerat, Syro facilius emundato significato per nationes emundationis in Christo lumine earum quae septem maculis capitalium delictorum inhorrent, idolatria, blasphemia, homicidio, adulterio, stupro, falso testimonio, fraude. "Adv. Marc." IV, c. 9 Oehler, Vol. II, pp. 174 sq. Oehler quotes Fr. Iunius as saying of the text "Locus obscurus, quia scribit auctor ex Marcionitarum hypotesi." Op. cit., p. 175 in footnote. The "Anf." version is as follows: If, however, the Creator's prophet Elisha cleansed Naaman the Syrian alone, to the exclusion of so many lepers in Israel, this fact contributes nothing to the distinction of Christ, as if He were in this way the better one for cleansing this Israelite leper, although a stranger to him, whom his own Lord had been unable to cleanse. The cleansing of the Syrian rather was significant throughout the nations of the world of their own cleansing in Christ their light, steeped as they were in the stains of the seven deadly sins: idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false-witness, and fraud. "Anf." Vol. III, p. 356. The solid probability that Tertullian is here quoting Marcion's words concerning the seven capital sins opens up an avenue of doubt as to whether Tertullian himself accepted the list of sins mentioned as a standardized enumeration. Several variations in the list of "Pud." 19 leave the doubt unsettled.

9 "Pud." 19; Sunt autem et contraria istis, ut graviora et exitiosa, quae veniam non capiant, homicidium, idololatria, fraus, negatio, blasphemia, utique et moechia et fornicatio, et si qua alia violatio templi Dei. (de Labriolle p. 182.) It will be noticed that there are eight, or even more, sins mentioned in the enumeration which agrees however substantially with the text from "Adv. Marc." IV, 9.

a particular sense to the term *capital* as to an accepted designation of a certain number of sins.<sup>10</sup> The sequence given in Adv. Marc. IV, 9, *idololatria, blasphemia, homicidio, adulterio, stupro, falso testimonio, fraude*, follows with the exception of the last term—and explicitly the second last term—the order of the Ten Commandments. The order of succession given in Pud. 19; *homicidium, idololatria, fraus, negatio, blasphemia, utique et meochia et fornicatio, et si qua alia violatio templi Dei*, finds, perhaps, a partial excuse for its disregard of perspective in Tertullian's intention of stressing the sins of the flesh. There is no method in the sequence of the first five terms. If it was Tertullian's intention to enumerate a standardized series of sins it would seem a proper sequence should have been given. The variation in number and the apparent lack of a standard sequence makes it highly probable that there was no set number of sins claiming the definite term *capital* as a generic appellation. The similarity between the passages need not be explained by recourse to an accepted enumeration of sins. A reason, simple enough, for the similarity can be found in the fact that several enumerations of the principal sins will by their very nature be restricted to possibly the same offenses, if not the same terminology. The chief transgressions of the Ten Commandments will always be mentioned as the principal sins with a variation, most probably, of terms according to the viewpoint which the morality concepts of the enumerator would fashion.

In the passages which offer synonymic concepts for the term *capital* we find sufficient grounds for the assumption that the term *capital sins* was not used to signify a set group of sins in the sense which we find ascribed to it for the Tertullianic period of Christianity. *Honoravit utique moechiam, quam homicidio anteponit, in prima itaque fronte sanctissimae legis in primis titulis caelestis edicti, principalium utique delictorum proscriptione signatam*. Pud. V. 5, (de Labr. p. 72). *Moechia*

10 D'Alès, "L'édit. de Call., pp. 205 sq.



is either in this term or in a similar one always mentioned as one of the capital sins. If any passage should demand its enumeration according to a recognized and accepted terminology, the passage just quoted would surely lay claim to that right. We find in it several qualifications that apply to the position of *moechia* among the transgressions of the decalogue. We find the *proscriptio* with which *moechia* is marked in the clauses: *Homicidio anteposit, in prima fronte, in primis titulis*. The particle *utique* makes the final clause a self evident conclusion or one about which there can be no reasonable doubt, at least according to Tertullian's view. It is to be admitted, if we argue along Tertullian's lines, that the conclusion was one with which all moralizers should agree. The use of standardized terms would therefore be most expected in just such a passage. If *capital sins* had been a quite universally recognized title for certain transgressions, the appearance of the expression could be most logically demanded in the passage quoted.

It may be well to preclude an objection that could easily arise from the consideration, that Tertullian by *principal* meant perhaps the more or most prominent sins among those recognized as capital. Tertullian has, however, in the passages we considered, given capital as much superlative force as any other similar adjective that he used in qualifying *delictum* or *crimen*.<sup>11</sup>

In *Pat. V*.<sup>12</sup> murder, adultery, trafficking in impurity, are mentioned as *principalia penes dominum delicta*. Other sins, also are mentioned in the context. They seem to be connected however as preliminaries to the few just mentioned. Among the concomitant or preliminary sins we find hatred, anger and avarice. If we consider them as merely connected with the graver sins of murder and impurity—and there is apparently no contextual objection thereto, for we may rightly assume that Tertullian understood hatred, anger and avarice to be

<sup>11</sup> Cf. passage adduced above in discussion of the question concerning the synonymic value of the terms capital and mortal.

<sup>12</sup> Oehler, Vol. I, p. 597, line 20.

sinful dispositions rather than sinful acts—we have then two of the usual three capital or principal sins. Idolatry is left out in that enumeration but it is added apparently in afterthought to the preceding number in the final paragraph of the chapter mentioned. There is however no conclusive evidence from the passage, in which mention is made of Israel's turning gold into an idol,<sup>13</sup> that any stress is placed on idolatry as an effect of impatience. The sin of idolatry is not mentioned as such. The sin of turning gold into an idol enters somewhat incidentally into the narration of the several occasions on which Israel impatiently deserted God. It cannot be said that Tertullian sufficiently mentioned idolatry in this passage to give us reason for the assumption that idolatry constituted with murder and impurity a standardized trio of sins at this period, at least in Tertullian's writings.

It should be remembered that *De Patientia* appeared between six and twelve years before *De Idololatria* or *De Pudicitia*, in which works the enumeration of the trio becomes more prominent.<sup>14</sup> If Tertullian grouped the principal or capital sins into a standardized trio we have no definite proof thereof in his Catholic period. The logical sequence of ideas in his Catholic works<sup>15</sup> would not warrant the supposition that Tertullian wished to be complete in his enumeration<sup>16</sup> of all sins due to impatience, especially of the principal ones. The addition of idolatry, moreover, would have been made with some explanatory remark, and its separation from the others would likewise have been called to our attention for its special mention. This passage therefore from *Pat. V*, the only one that can be adduced from Tertullian's Catholic period, does not sufficiently demonstrate that in Tertullian's orthodox theology a separate grouping of principal sins is to be found. Still less reason have we

13 "Pat." V. Oehler I, p. 598, line 7: cum in idolum auri sui collationes defundit.

14 "Pat." belongs, moreover, to Tert's. Catholic period, "Idol." to his Semi-Montanistic interlude, "Pud." is Montanistic.

15 E. g. "Orat.," "Apol.," "Test. Anim."

16 "Pat." V.

to believe that *principal* and *capital* are used with a specifically different sense. There is of course no logical demand for a presentation of the capital sins in the passage just considered, but we could expect, with some justification, to see them mentioned under a standard title, such title existed.

The passage from *Pud.* 1<sup>17</sup> offers nothing towards the question under consideration: *Nec enim moechia et fornicatio de modicis et de maximis delictis deputabuntur.* It is evident from the context that Tertullian is using the terms most aptly fitted to round out his argument against the edict concerning the remission of "one of the greatest sins." *Sed cum ea sint quae culmen criminum teneant, non capiunt et indulgeri quasi modica et praecaveri quasi maxima*<sup>18</sup> refers to the capital sins for *culmen criminum* is obviously a synonymic expression for *capital* or *principal*.

In the next passage: *Nobis autem maxima aut summa sic quoque praecaventur* the term *capital* would well have been used, since, on the one hand, Tertullian was not in need of a superlative for contrast with the following thought, and, on the other hand, the mention of capital sin, if such a term existed in theological terminology as an accepted expression, would have most logically fitted the trend of argument in his first chapter attack on the decree of Callixtus. The terms *maxima*, *summa*, and *culmen criminum* are qualifying expressions of ordinary terminology. A standardized expression as *delicta capitalia* would have found its way into Tertullian's introductory argument. It is true, the term *capital* appears in other parts of *Pud.* But if we may assume that the first chapter is along general lines in so far as it attacks the decree of the *Pontifex Maximus* because of its asserted break with the traditional penitential discipline and its supposedly disastrous results in inviting to further sin, it is undoubtedly very reasonable to expect the use of a term, which because of its accepted conceptual

17 Oehler Vol. I, p. 794, lines 8, 11 sq.

18 Ibid., line 9.



meaning would appeal more forcibly to the Christian public or surely to the better educated classes thereof. The body of *Pud.* deals directly with the arguments presumably adduced by the Psychics in support of the edict.

Even in the body of Tertullian's criticism of the edict we find no one special argument grouped about the expression *capitalia delicta*. As a matter of fact the argument, or better the minor premise of the argument, in which the expression occurs, is adduced as a secondary element. It is indeed only after the conclusion of a lengthy defense of the interpretation which he puts on certain parables, principally that of the prodigal son, that mention is made of capital sins. And the mention they receive is quite incidental. Tertullian closes his argumentative interpretation of the parables by stating: *Puto me et materiae parabolarum et congruentiae rerum et tutelae disciplinarum accomodatioris interpretationes reddidisse. Pud. IX, 20, (de Labr. p. 106).* Then he immediately adds as if because of secondary importance: *Ceterum si in hoc gestit diversa pars ovem et drachmam et filii luxuriam christiano peccatori configurare, ut moechiam et fornicationem paenitentia donent, aut et cetera delicta pariter capitalia concedi oportebit, aut paria quoque eorum moechiam et fornicationem inconcessibilia servari. Pud. IX, 20, (de Labr. pp. 106, 108.)* The next sentence takes up an altogether different thought, the enunciation of a general principle concerning the legitimate extent of interpretation: *Sed plus est, quod nihil aliud argumentari licet citra id de quo agebatur.*<sup>19</sup> We say that the sentence *Sed plus* etc., takes up an altogether different thought. However, there is at least a general reference to the lengthy argumentative interpretation of the various parables. The thought expressed in the sentence referring to the *delicta capitalia* is completely overlooked.

Difficult as the dilemma which Tertullian interjects (*aut et cetera delicta pariter capitalia concedi oportebit,*

<sup>19</sup> "Pud." IX, 21, *ibid.*—The English translation very correctly begins with a new paragraph. "Anf." Vo. IV, p. 84.

*aut paria quoque eorum moechiam et fornicationem inconcessibilia servari*) may seem, he pays apparently little attention to it, which may be due to the consideration that, for the present, he is interested principally in showing what he considers a more appropriate interpretation. Incidentally, the forensic mind of Tertullian added its reflection to the exegetical product.<sup>20</sup> Not improbable either is the consideration that the dilemma would open up too large a field for argument with his adversary. *Moechia* and *fornicatio* had to be demonstrated as the irremissible sins, others for the present must not enter to disturb the trend of the broader argument.

Before proceeding to the examination of the other texts in *Pud.* which use the term *capital* it is well to note in the present one the full meaning of a few words that are used in connection with *capital*. Tertullian speaks here of *cetera delicta*. To our knowledge there is no passage in Tertullian that uses *cetera* for merely two. Adultery, murder and idolatry are not *the three capital* sins. This text seems to be a confirmation of that statement. *Cetera*, we believe with a good probability, does not apply merely to murder and idolatry. If there are several sins to be recognized as capital their number includes others beside those just mentioned. Eight irremissible sins are listed in *Pud.* 19. Their striking resemblance to those listed in *Adv. Marc.* IV, 9, give them the title of *capital*, but the very difference in number shows that *capital* was not applied to a stated number of sins and, viewed in the light of the two texts just mentioned, makes it highly improbable that *capital* had any definite recognized application in moral terminology. *Cetera* in *Pud.* IX, 20, apparently refers to a series of sins that includes seven or eight or even more.

It is a fine question as to whether *cetera* was used here by Tertullian in the sense of "the other" or merely of "other" capital sins. The answer would have little or no consequence perhaps for the general question concerning

20 D'Alès "L'Édit." de Call." p. 199, lines 15, 16.

the extent and the import of the term *capital*. It might however be of some value if we could determine whether Tertullian meant to leave it to admissible divergent views as to what should and what should not be considered capital.

Concerning the term *pariter* it may be stated with certainty that Tertullian did not use it here equivalent to *absolute*, that is, *eodem gradu*. The term *capital* would not easily lend itself to strict comparison. In *Pud.* V the relative position of adultery to murder and idolatry is treated at length, in Tertullian's Montanistic view of course, and with more rhetorical than exegetical exactness.<sup>21</sup> We may attach more probability to the consideration that *pariter* should not modify *capitalia* if the latter has an established place in theological terminology. The second member of the dilemma *aut paria quoque eorum moechiam et fornicationem inconcessibilia servari* does not militate against this probability since *paria* is used with the evident intent of strengthening the dilemma by making one term in the second member correspond to one in the first. Incidentally, it is to be added that Tertullian seems to place more stress on the parity of the eminence above other sins than on the eminence itself. The quality of being capital, or eminent, is presupposed. We may well suppose that a much stronger argument could have been made by appealing principally to a presumably standardized title.

The other passage in *Pud.* in which the word *capital* occurs is as follows: *Adeo nihil ad delicta fidelium capitalia potestas solvendi et alligandi Petro emancipata.* *Pud.* XXI, 14, (de Labriolle p. 196). As indicated above a plausible interpretation of what *capital* means in this passage is given by a brief consideration of the context

<sup>21</sup> D' Alès' "Édit. de Call." p. 198' criticising the way in which Tertullian maneuvers the relative positions of idolatry, murder and impurity, states: "Le mouvement est beau, sans doute, mais il est faux, car pour le rendre plus dramatique, Tertullian a dû intervertir l'ordre du cinquième et du sixième précepte du Décalogue: en réalité, l'impudicité, n'y est mentionnée qu'après l' homicide. Il faut donc reconnaître ici une erreur, sinon un artifice conscient."



in which the term is found. Sins against the Lord, not sins against the neighbor, were to be retained, if, indeed, *alligare* or *retinere* are at all according, to Tertullian, to be interpreted as referring to the Power of the Keys. Capital sins would therefore have to be considered sins against the Lord. Sins against the neighbor are not capital. As to what has become of the subdivision of sins, namely those against the temple of God, there is no information to be found. In the preceding chapter Tertullian had just mentioned the distinction of mortal sins into those against God and those against His temple. It is hardly plausible that within so short a space Tertullian would have set aside the distinction he had just mentioned. It could be argued that Tertullian is lightly brushing away or passing over the importance attached to the argument of the Psychics based on the power granted to Peter, and that, strictly speaking there is no apparent reason why Tertullian should mention the three classifications of sin, those against the Lord, those against His temple, and those against the neighbor.

Undoubtedly the expression *nisi forte* in *Pud.* XXI, 15 sufficiently indicates that Tertullian considers Peter's power of binding an exegetical difficulty of very minor importance, as is plainly demonstrated in the text immediately following: *Praejudicatur enim non dimittenda in Deum delicta, cum in homine admissa donantur. Pud.* XXI, 15. A logical argument is apparently not even demanded to justify his standpoint. *Praejudicatur* is sufficiently conclusive to hold that the comprehensiveness of *quaecunque*, which is used both in connection with *alligare* and *solvere*, is therefore lightly dismissed. But it must be remembered that the theme of Tertullian's work *De Pudicitia* is precisely the defense of the *irremissibilia peccata in templum dei*. Therefore they should have been mentioned, and with special stress. The consideration that sins against the temple of God are also sins against God does not enter here, for it remains to be demonstrated that Tertullian comprehended the former under the latter.

Of course, this text could be adduced to prove that sins against the temple of God are but a species of the sins against God himself, but we think the argument would not be convincing, because of the important reflection given above, namely, that Tertullian's purpose in *De Pudicitia* was to bring forth all favorable points for purity.

Since the argument of the Psychics taken from the power granted to Peter for the remission of sins was undoubtedly one of their strongest proofs, the inference seems absolutely justified that Tertullian on his part, even though he seemingly tries to pass over the difficulty, would touch on his principal object, the irremissibility of sins against the temple of God. As stated above, the capital sins of the faithful, comprised according to the context only those which were against God. The supposition that Tertullian purposely left sins against God's temple altogether out of consideration and that, consequently, *capitalia* is not to be interpreted strictly according to the context as non-inclusive of sins against God's temple loses support in view of the Montanistic doctrine that idolatry, a sin against God, was, as to its exemption from the power of Peter, at least in the same class as impurity. The text cannot be dismissed, therefore, as not to the point or as an insufficient argument against the term *capital* as an accepted expression in theological terminology. On the contrary the very value of it in the supposition that it was an accepted term should lead us to expect its use not only frequently in so important a work as *Pud.* but above all in so prominent a passage as the one we have just considered.

It is quite obvious from the passages considered that capital sin is an expression which had an altogether different meaning in Tertullian's day from the one that is now prevalent in theological science. The expression is used today as a definite term for the principal vices. We say *definite* in the sense that the principal vices or evil habits or sources of moral evil constitute a number universally recognized by Catholic theologians of today

under the title *capital*. St. Thomas<sup>22</sup> calls a capital vice that which has an exceedingly desirable end, so that in his desire for it man goes to the commission of many sins all of which are said to originate in that vice as their chief source. *Capital*, therefore, according to St. Thomas, means the same as source. No mention is made of the term *capital* as the equivalent of *principal*.

From the various texts and context investigation which we have submitted in the preceding pages concerning the conceptual relation of *capital* to *mortal*, *principal* and *irremissible*, and concerning the conceptual content of *capital* we are inclined to be of the opinion that the term *capital* had no set theologico-terminological value in Tertullian's day, that there is not sufficient reason to believe that it had the same content as *mortal*, though there might be some reason for the opinion that capital was most probably an ordinary substitute for the term *principal*; that it referred to actual sin, not so much to evil vice; that it was used to describe sins which stood out above others by reason of their greater degree of sinfulness. Whether it was used in the sense which is to be found in penal laws still remains to be settled. We are not concerned with that phase of the question.

The investigation of the conceptual content of capital sin is preparatory for the proper study of personal sin in Tertullian's works in so far as it shows in the passages considered some of the restrictions to be placed on the extent of the terms. Though the restrictions are of a negative nature and give us but little positive ground on which to construct the principal outlines of the concept, they are sufficient to guard us against assumptions that are found wanting when sifted for substance.

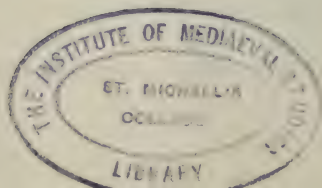
It is true, though trite, that we are only too prone to accept as certain that which appears probable, and so-called circumstantial proofs are overlooked as to their real value and taken for demonstrated, while their basis still lacks verification. This is especially applicable in

22 IIa-IIae, q. 153, art. 4; Ia-IIae, q. 84, art. 3 sq.



deductions from terminology. Terms have not the permanency of concepts. The history of the development of Catholic dogma furnishes ample proof for that. The solid contents of the articles of faith existed at all times in the history of the Church, while terminology, according to the development of conditions, perfected itself to give the concepts their concrete expression. It would therefore be presuming too much as demonstrated, if we were to accept without further investigation a term as representing a standard concept merely because that term occurs several times in an apparently set form.

The term *capital*, as we have seen, occurs several times in the works of Tertullian and at first glance occupies a recognized place among the terms he uses in designating the various kinds of *delicta*. We do not find sufficient evidence for attaching more importance to it than to any similar term. *Principal* has quite probably as much right to be considered a set theological term as *capital*. To all appearance, however, the term *principal* in Tertullian's time was not to be found in sanctioned theological terminology.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE TERTULLIANIC TERM "MORTAL."

In the following pages we shall take up the concept of mortal sin in the works of Tertullian. We shall strive to construct from texts and contexts his view of mortal sin both as to content and extent. The question as to whether the Catholic view or the non-Catholic views on this important elementary concept of Christian morality have any support in the tradition of Christian doctrine in Tertullian's day is of course a fundamental study of the investigation of Tertullian's works. His influential position in the early stages of theological thought gives this topic a prominence most worthy of consideration. As has been stated, he was a determining factor in the molding not merely of theological thought but also of theological terminology. As to matters Catholic, his varying viewpoint must of course be taken thoroughly into consideration. It is quite evident to the sincere-minded reader of Tertullian that whole concepts may be taken bodily even from the Montanistic works of Tertullian, such as the high esteem in which Christianity held the virtue of purity, whereas correct Catholic concepts on certain points are obtained by direct denial of Tertullian's extreme view, such as the Catholic view of marriage and second nuptials in opposition to his exaggerated opinion concerning the means of preserving the high Christian ideals of purity.

In the investigation of Tertullian's concept of mortal sin it must be borne in mind that his principal expressions on this topic are to be found in his Montanistic writing *De Pudicitia*. The futile objection that a Catholic concept can be construed in an *a priori* method simply by dropping the undesirable elements and ascribing their omission to Tertullian's position will find its ready answer in the fact that Tertullian himself has drawn sufficiently discernible lines between himself and the opposition. Then, too, a concept cannot be construed without

a sufficient basis, either directly or indirectly, in the wording of the author, in whose works a concept is sought. A sufficient basis is only that which affords a plausible interpretation of the author's mind.

It is a significant fact that the term *mortal* does not occur in any other work of Tertullian outside of *De Pudicitia*. It is a quite elementary term in Christian morality, and the expectation that Tertullian would have used it on other occasions besides in the attack on the papal edict concerning the remissibility of a certain kind of sins finds justification in the consideration that Tertullian's ascetico-moral works are of no small number and length. If the term *mortal* were to be considered presumably the equivalent of *irremissible* in *Pud*, there is little reason to find it used in any other work which does not touch on the topic of remission of sins. There might be some plausibility to the assumption that Tertullian used the term *mortal* merely in view of the well known passage of I *John* V, 16. As we shall strive to show later, the texts adduced support this supposition quite conclusively, and there is no solid reason to interpret Tertullian's composition otherwise. The details of this plausible possibility we shall take up in the course of the next few pages.

The term *mortal* occurs, as has been said, only in *De Pudicitia*. It occurs several times in this work, and the passages in which it appears are grouped together, with the exception of its first appearance, namely in chapter 3. The other chapters are 19 and 21. In the former, *Pud.* 19, we might say it occurs in an exegetical capacity, and is used to summarize Tertullian's interpretation of I *John* V, 16. No special importance is apparent in the introduction of the term in *Pud.* 3, nor in *Pud.* 19, which lack of explanation can be interpreted to mean that *mortal sin* is an accepted technical term and its use is considered quite common place, or that *mortal* is an ordinary adjective (or substantive-adjective as the text requires) of a merely descriptive capacity. For the present it is not of decisive importance which alternative we choose,



for a third supposition is also possible and makes the speculation as to the relative function of the term quite superfluous. We may suppose, with sufficient probability, that the term is neither in the state of technical terminology nor in the function of an ordinary adjective, but that it is in the transition period. Indeed, after some consideration of Tertullian's use of the word, one would be inclined to think that he is taking the adjective from the rank and file of ordinary descriptives to give it a definite theologico-terminological meaning.

A thorough investigation of the various passages in which the term occurs will give us a fair concept of what Tertullian wished to convey by his use thereof. The term first appears in *Pud.* III, 3: *quantum autem ad nos, qui solum Dominum meminimus delicta concedere, et utique mortalia, non frustra agetur (scil. paenitentia).*<sup>1</sup> As is evident from the context, Tertullian is replying to an objection of the Psychics, namely, that if there be no hope of pardon, penance is useless. From the fact that there is no introductory or, at least, no explanatory clause or phrase in the immediate text or context, one would be inclined to believe that Tertullian was using a well known term.

It is true there is no clue to the cause of the term's sudden appearance in chapter 3, which chapter, by the way, is not in logical sequence with the preceding or the following chapters. It deals, namely, entirely with the objection mentioned, the solution of which Tertullian wishes to give in due time in order to do away with the possible accusation of inconsistency in his general system of penance. The fear of the accusation, which he saw arising in the mind of the Psychics, led him to break off the trend of his treatise to check the harmful influence the charge of inconsistency would have on his readers. Tertullian himself seems to realize that in his system of penance there is indeed a contradiction which

1 Oehler, Vol. I, p. 197, lines 14, 15.—De Labriolle op. cit., p. 68.

must be answered at all costs. Hence this chapter 3 is interjected.

It begins with a *sed prius*. There is however in the preceding chapter a quotation from I *John* V, 16 with a few exegetical remarks, which would let us understand the use of the term *mortalia* in the third chapter. Proximity must supply sequence in giving a reason for the use of the term. The quotation from I *John* V, 16 deals with the sin unto death.<sup>2</sup> In the quotation and in Tertullian's explanation the phrase *ad mortem* occurs three times.<sup>3</sup> It is highly probable that Tertullian in referring to *delicta ad mortem* in the third chapter simply chose the adjective *mortalia* in place of the descriptive phrase *delicta ad mortem*. As a matter of fact, the passage in *Pud.* III apparently demands the adjective form in preference to that of the phrase. The construction of Tertullian's reply and the clearness with which he wishes to state it, make the use of the adjective very advisable.

The forensic mind of Tertullian would not permit a disturbing element to enter into what he probably considered a most explicit statement of his position. If Tertullian had stated: *qui solum dominum meminimus delicta ad mortem concedere*, in place of the setting he gave his words: *qui solum dominum meminimus delicta concedere, et utique mortalia*, the statement would have apparently lost in strength, since, in the preceding chapter, the singular form *delictum ad mortem* had the Scriptural impress, which Tertullian would not easily pluralize. The form in which he expressed his thought seems preferable. It could be argued that a repetition of the term *delicta* with the phrase *ad mortem* would have been even stronger than the form which he used, but as already indicated Tertullian considered it poor policy to

<sup>2</sup> Clem. "Die christliche Lehre von der Suende," I, p. 98, Goettingen, 1897.

<sup>3</sup> "Pud." II, 14, *Sed et Joannes docebit: "Si quis scit fratrem suum delinquere delictum non ad mortem, postulabit, et dabitur vita ei; quia non ad mortem delinquit."* Hoc erit remissibile. "Est delictum ad mortem: non pro illo dico' ut quis postulet." Hoc erit irremissibile.

tamper with Scriptural form when the same results could be obtained by retaining the terms used in Scriptural Writings well known to the faithful. Of course, Tertullian knew well how to change Scriptural expressions when necessity in extricating himself from an objection called for it. We would say that in *Pud.* 3 there is no apparent reason why we should consider the term *mortale* one of recognized standing in theological terminology.

One reflection however urges itself upon our minds at this stage of the investigation, namely, that the term in the interpretation which it has received from its explanatory variation of the Scriptural *ad mortem* would most probably retain the content here given it by Tertullian because of the outstanding position it occupies through its connection with so important a statement as the passage quoted. Its further use in *Pud.* will, of course, receive importance, meaning and direction from the beacon passage in which it made its first appearance. For here it stands so to speak in a Tertullianic thesis: *nos meminimus solum Dominum delicta concedere, et utique mortalia*. The concept, therefore, expressed by the term *mortal* here is that which corresponds to Tertullian's exegetical interpretation of I John V. 16, *delictum ad mortem*. A more extensive exegesis of this passage from *John* we find in *Pud.* 19 where we also have the next application of the term *delicta mortalia*.

It is well to remember before proceeding to an examination of *Pud.* 19 that in the first passage (*Pud.* 3) we have sufficient reason to believe that the concept of mortal sin as distinguished from the concept of venial sin finds no challenging denial. It is not at all a settled matter how far the concept of a *delictum ad mortem* extended in Tertullian's view, or what sins it included definitely. As is quite apparent from *Pud.* 2<sup>4</sup> irremissibility and mortal sinfulness were co-extensive. Remissibility and irremissibility were Tertullian's only consideration.

<sup>4</sup> "John" V, 16, "Hoc erit irremissibile." De Labriolle, p. 66. Oehler I, p. 796, lines 11 sqq.



The objective element, gravity of matter and the subjective prerequisites free will and understanding, are not at all in Tertullian's mind. Even the infinite malice of grievous sins as such does not enter into the discussion. Tertullian's one concern was to construe his Montanistic doctrine according to I *John* V, 16. Evidently no accommodation for the denial of the distinction between mortal and venial sin can be found in the passage under consideration (*Pud.* 3). If Tertullian, in his in *Pud.* 2.

The assertion therefore that according to tradition all sins are mortal, would not find any support in the passage under consideration (*Pud.* 3). If Tertullian, in his Montanistic rigorism, would have held that all sins are mortal there would most probably be some vestige of his opinion in this or the other texts in which the term mortal occurs. He would have had a welcome opportunity to show his belief that some sins are remitted only in the next life, and that others, though mortal, are remitted even in this.<sup>5</sup> Though he speaks in *Pud.* 2 of the sins that are remissible he makes no mention of the malice of sin as such.

Of course, he is viewing sin only as the cause of penance, and there seems to be no doubt about the kind of penance he means, namely that which was performed in public. Such sins came under his consideration that could be held to be as grievous as the sins against purity. Hence we see him setting himself the task of distinguishing thoroughly and forcefully between classes of serious sin. The concept of a sin that does not belong to the classes of serious transgressions does not enter into the scope of the chapter, although, as some parts of his second chapter indicate in which he treats of the mutual forgiveness of faults against the neighbor, there would undoubtedly have been a most appropriate occasion to mention the allegedly infinite malice, objective and sub-

5 D'Alès, "La Théol. de Tert." p. 275.

jective, of every offense, not only of the offense against the angelic virtue.

The argument of silence, while it does not disprove the Catholic teaching, does not favor in any manner the non-Catholic view indicated above. It could be said that, since Tertullian omitted mentioning the classification of sins that were most evidently not *ad mortem*, there existed no traditional doctrine concerning them. The same argument could be used to prove that Tertullian had no knowledge of the equality of all offenses with respect to their infinite malice, for, just at this stage of Tertullian's explanations, a proposition by Tertullian concerning the allegedly common element of infinite offense to be found in all sins would at once have clarified the state of the question in his argument with the Psychics.

The concept then, which we believe accompanied the word *mortal* in this treatise as evidenced by *Pud.* 2 and 3 comprised the following elements: the Church's inability to restore a sinner guilty of a *delictum ad mortem* to membership, the restriction of the power of remitting such sin to God alone, and, consequently, a gravity of offense that took the offender out of the jurisdiction and the communion of the Church. The term *delictum ad mortem* has therefore, in its last analysis, most probably the meaning that before death there is no sign of forgiveness. The sinner guilty of a *delictum ad mortem* is to remain outside the jurisdiction of the Church, he is ecclesiastically dead. The concept does not deny the existence of the classes of sin that are mortal in our present day sense nor the existence of sins that are venial, as the term is understood today in Catholic teaching. It plainly does not assert or insinuate the opinion that all sins are equally mortal in the sense of infinite offense.

As stated above, the concept of *delictum ad mortem*, or of *delictum mortale*, occurs again in *Pud.* 19. Here we find the term used twice, at the conclusion of a chapter, in which we find Tertullian strenuously striving to disentangle several apparently conflicting concepts of sinfulness in the first epistle of St. John. The term *mortal*,

the Tertullianic sense of which we are investigating in these paragraphs, does not represent however a concept different from the one implied in *Pud* c.<sup>6</sup>

A glance at the text and context in which the term *mortal* occurs shows that it is merely another version of the Scriptural phrase *ad mortem*. In preceding parts of *Pud*. 19 Tertullian speaks of various classifications of sin which are mortal in the sense which he has applied in chapter 3. There is no evidence whatsoever that the term *mortal* displays any new phase of concept, or that it is used in a manner which would lead us to believe that it is an accepted term of the theology of Tertullian's time. In describing the more comprehensive classifications of sin he speaks of those faults which are of daily occurrence. *Nam nec ipsi excidimus a qua digressi sumus distinctione delictorum.—Et hic enim illam Ioannes commendavit, quod sint quaedam delicta cotidiana incursionis, quibus omnes simus obiecti.—Sunt autem et contraria istis, ut graviora et exitiosa.*<sup>7</sup> He speaks there also of *delicta* that are contrary to the daily faults, such as the graver ones and the destructive ones. *Exitiosa* is the only term which would approximate the meaning of the term *mortal*.

There is one probable reason why Tertullian did not use *mortal* here in the place of *exitiosa*, though the term *mortal* plainly would have served the cause of Tertullian's defense more because of immediate clearness, less, perhaps, because of carrying final conviction. The term *mortal*, as we have seen, has been used in *Pud*. 3 in connection with the Scriptural phrase *ad mortem*. It is again at the end of *Pud*. 19 that Tertullian expatiates on

6 "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 838, lines 18 sqq. *Meminerat et ipse Hieremiam prohibitum a deo deprecari pro populo mortalia delinquente. Omnis iniustitia delictum est, et est delictum ad mortem. Scimus autem, quod omnis qui ex deo natus sit non delinquit, scilicet delictum quod ad mortem est. Ita nihil iam superest quam aut neges moechiam et fornicationem mortalia esse delicta, aut inremissibilia fatearis, pro quibus nec exorare premititur.—*The different text readings do not influence the meaning of the term *mortal* in this chapter.

7 "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 837, lines 29 sqq. and p. 838, lines 6, 7.



the passage from St. John, which uses the phrase *ad mortem* repeatedly. Perhaps it is for the purpose of confirmation that Tertullian uses the term *mortal* in the immediate connection with that phrase and has reserved its use for the specific part of his argument in chapter 19 to condemn in an especial manner the gravity of *moechia* and *fornicatio*. The term *exitiosa* however represents the Tertullianic concept of *mortal* sufficiently well, since the sins termed *delicta exitiosa* are such as receive no pardon and such for which Christ will not intercede.<sup>8</sup>

We would not be inclined therefore to believe that any modification of the Tertullianic concept of *mortal* has acceded to the use of the term in the part of *Pud.* we are now considering. Its omission in connection with the classification of sins enumerated as *cotidiana*, *graviora*, *exitiosa* would, moreover, argue that the term was most probably not of a standardized meaning. In fact, its quite commonplace substitution for the phrase *ad mortem* at the end of the chapter shows that there was most probably no further importance to be attached to it. Hence, it would be merely an assumption, and not a demonstrated fact, that the term *mortal* had an accepted terminological function in conveying the concept of a certain classification of sins. We say the use of *mortal* at the end of *Pud.* 19 seems merely a substitute for the phrase *ad mortem* and consequently represents merely the concept which Tertullian had in his exegetical interpretation of I John V, 16sq. If we examine the concluding paragraph of *Pud.* 19 we think this statement will find sufficient support.

The final paragraph begins with the sentence: *Ita Ioannis ratio constabit etc.*<sup>9</sup> The paragraph is not so much a summary of the preceding explanation of the apparently conflicting statements in St. John that those born of God do not sin (I John III, 9) and that if we say

8 "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 838, lines 7 sqq., "exitiosa, quae veniam non capiunt.—Horum ultra exorator non erit Christus."

9 Ibid., lines 11 sqq.

we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (I *John* 1, 8), as it is a conclusion against the Psychics in the presentation of the dilemma: *aut mortalia delicta aut irremissibilia fatearis*. The term *mortal* occurs only after Tertullian has again adduced the Scriptural phrase—three times to be precise.

The verse from I *John* V, 16 is, therefore, the basis on which Tertullian constructs his concept of mortal sin, using the term as Tertullian considers it interpretative of St. John's text. No introductory or explanatory clauses are used to describe the term in its setting at the end of *Pud.* 19. Its mere association with the Scriptural text which uses the phrase *ad mortem* repeatedly suffices to indicate the purpose for which Tertullian intended it. To give it more importance than that of substitution seems to place an interpretation on its use that would not be in accordance with a primary rule of text explanation, namely, that a text is to be understood as it stands in its objective reading, unless sufficient reasons suggest other meanings.

The remaining text in which the term *mortal* occurs is found in *Pud.* 21: *Quis enim dimittit delicta, ni solus deus? et utique mortalia quae in ipsum fuerint admissa, et in templum eius.*<sup>10</sup> This passage is the only one in which the term *mortal* receives any further description than that given by the context. In other passages from Tertullian on the term *mortal*, the whole significance of the term was derived from the immediate connection with the Scriptural phrase *ad mortem*. Here Tertullian presupposes the difficulty concerning the forgiveness of the *delictum ad mortem* as a settled matter. The sen-

<sup>10</sup> Oehler I, p. 842, lines 4, 5.—The edition "Joh. Gangneii," Paris, 1545, has one small variation which will not affect the text reading decisively, though it gives rise to a probable interpretation. This edition has: *et utique mortalia quod in ipsum fuerint admissa et in templum ejus*. The *quod* refers most probably to the preceding question: *quis enim dimittit delicta ni solus deus?*, though it is not excluded that *quod* could refer to *mortalia* by way of explanation of the term. Then however it would have the same meaning as the relative clause given in the editions of Oehler and Wissowa.

tence in which the term occurs is merely a rhetorical question.<sup>11</sup> Of the four instances in which the term *mortal* is used by Tertullian the passage taken from *Pud.* 21 is the only one which does not refer to St. John's expression *delictum ad mortem* either in the text or in the immediate context. However, sufficient emphasis had been placed on the association of the term with the expression *ad mortem* in a former part of *Pud.* It is not to be assumed that Tertullian would be obliged to repeat, after the interposition of a chapter of average length, the connection between the phrase and the adjective expression of the context. There is not sufficient reason to believe that this one passage, in which the Scriptural expression has been omitted, or better said, does not occur, can establish the accepted usage of the term *mortal*.

The most we can admit is that Tertullian himself is coining, in this passage, the term for future use. No doubt his writings had a wide circle of readers. The repeated use of the term in connection with the Scriptural phrase and its detached appearance would perhaps suffice to give his large number of readers an acquaintance with the term and its concept which would make for a general acceptance of the newly appearing theological expression.

While, therefore, Tertullian's use of the term in the last passage quoted might be considered as introducing *mortal* as the most appropriate expression and suggesting it to the theological thinkers of his day, there can be no conclusive evidence brought to show that the term was already established and accepted. Not only can no conclusive evidence be brought, but the indications are all the other way. The dependent use of the term in *Pud.* 3 and 19 would argue that the term was used merely as a substituent adjective without any further importance attached to it. Even the detached use of *mortal* in *Pud.* 21 does not make the impression of an independent term

11 The difference between the Oehler and the Wissowa texts, in matters of punctuation of the passage in question, is not consequential.



in view of the fact that its use in this chapter follows closely on the use of the term strongly stressed as dependent and substitutive at the end of *Pud.* 19. Then too, we should not forget that Tertullian, in all probability, would have used an accepted term with much more frequency in a writing of the nature of *De Pudicitia*. Had *delictum mortale* been a well established theological expression, there is all reason to believe that Tertullian would have applied it with telling effect in other passages besides those investigated above. If *delictum mortale* was an accepted term and Tertullian was giving it a different meaning we should undoubtedly find proof thereof in some passage of *Pud.*, especially in the outstanding parts that show the differences between him and the Psychics. Since there is not the slightest indication of proof in support of the supposition that Tertullian was using an accepted term but with the purpose of giving it a new concept, we must return to the speculation made above.

A consideration, perhaps worthy of more importance than the preceding argument, may be found in the fact that Tertullian is devoting his effort in the passages quoted to give a Montanistic interpretation to the Scriptural expression *delictum ad mortem*. At least he tries to turn the expression with its content and purpose in favor of the Montanistic doctrine on the irremissibility of certain sins. It is quite clear then that in the passage quoted Tertullian gives the expression his own interpretation.

What precisely the Psychic view on this matter was cannot be gathered sufficiently well from Tertullian's works. There is, however, enough contrast of doctrine mentioned to permit a deduction therefrom as to the general outlines of the Psychics' contention. At all events the term *mortal*, corrected or not corrected, does not play an important part, and the fact does not even come in for mention as a matter on which a change of discipline or of faith is to be registered. Since however the concept of mortal sin in the Tertullianic sense is perhaps the most salient point in the whole argument between Tertullian and the Psychics, at least from the

angle, of remissibility or irremissibility of sins, it is quite evident that the use of a supposedly accepted term would enter into the discussion for a large share of explanation not only in the state of the question but also in the development of the argumentation. If the argument *ex silentio* or rather *ex omissione* is frequently unsatisfactory because of undiscovered probable explanations and untouched viewpoints it nevertheless, with strong collateral indications, speaks against the assumption it tries to disprove.

The term mortal, as we see in the passage under consideration, namely *Pud.* 21 is modified by the clause: *quae in ipsum fuerint admissa, et in templum eius*. The various readings which make the clause either relative (descriptive, definitive, restrictive, explanatory) or causal, do not affect decisively the concept (Tertullianic) of *mortal*. We may safely assume the Oehler and Wissowa reading as relative.

If we begin with the context we find three classes of sin mentioned. We shall put aside for the present the question as to whether all of the classes mentioned are mortal in the Tertullianic sense. In the text itself we have the two classes of sin: those against God and those against His temple. In the sentence immediately following we find the third division, namely, the sins against the neighbor. *Nam tibi quae in te reatum habeant etiam septuagies septies iuberis indulgere in persona Petri*<sup>12</sup> A strict adherence to this division is not evidenced in this chapter, for toward the end of it we find the classifications reduced to the two: *delicta in dominum* and *delicta in fratrem* also termed *delicta in deum* and *delicta in hominem*.<sup>13</sup> Nor can we state that the division is adequate in the sense that the formal objects against which the *delicta in deum* and the *delicta in fratrem* are committed are adequately distinct. The distinction between the two larger divisions of sin (—we count the sins *in deum* and *in templum eius* under one heading as Tertullian himself does, though we do not understand why

12 "Pud." 21, Oehler I, p. 842, lines 5 sqq.

13 The text reading here should most probably be *in hominem*. The use of the ablative has no manifest purpose.

the latter class is not mentioned at end of c. 21<sup>14</sup>—) seems here to be based entirely on the remissibility of sin.

As we have seen, in describing the nature of sin according to Tertullian's view, the ultimate object against which sin is committed, is God Himself. There is no apparent reason to believe that Tertullian changed his viewpoint on this matter. The sins *in fratrem* would most probably mean the sins against charity, formally as such, though the enumeration of fraud among the irremissible sins, *Pud.* 19, here again comes forth as an objection, since fraud is against justice, formally as such, and, as stated above, is immediately against the neighbor and only mediately against God. The division therefore is not a clear-cut, distinct classification of sins and seems to take into consideration merely the element of irremissibility. We admit that this explanation of the distinction between sins against God and sins against the neighbor might not be satisfactory, but we believe that the recourse to the basis of the distinction as being the immediateness or mediateness of the object, against which sin is committed, merely moves the difficulty further back and places it under different terms.<sup>15</sup>

The Tertullianic concept of the term *mortal*, as we have thus far found it presented, would be applicable to the sins against God and His temple. The sins against the neighbor, therefore, would not be placed under the title *mortal* and in this passage, accordingly, would have to be distinguished as *non-mortal*, provided this passage itself does not disprove the whole fabric of the assumption that *mortal*, in the Tertullianic sense, is to be understood as we have tried to construe his use of the term.

There is a possible interpretation of the clause: *mortalia quae in ipsum fuerint admissa, et in templum eius*, which would give ground for a serious objection to our manner of understanding Tertullian's concept of *mortal*.

14 Namely in the sentence: nisi forte ea quae in dominum, non in fratrem, quis admiserit, "*Pud.*" 21, Oehler I, p. 844, lines 4, 5.

15 We have referred in the preceding chapter to Esser's attempt at a solution of Harnack's difficulty concerning the division of sins committed against God.



Namely, if we take the clause in a restrictive sense, *et utique mortalia* will mean the following: and, of course, only those sins among the mortal ones which are committed against God and His temple. The wording of the text itself would not justify this restrictive interpretation, but in the following sentence the sins against the neighbor are so strongly set in contrast with the preceding that there could nevertheless some basis be found for this restriction. However, the restrictive interpretation seems rather forced. Tertullian's usual clearness of expression would have suffered an exception. True, only in the light of a restrictive interpretation would the mention of fraud among the *delicta exitiosa* find any justification, but then that consideration looks in vain for a solution of the difficulty that, on the one hand, fraud is considered one of the crimes that receive no pardon and, on the other,—assuming that it is a *delictum in fratrem*—we find it among those which we are commanded to forgive.<sup>16</sup>

The difficulty makes itself felt as a striking inconsistency, an oversight, on the part of Tertullian, in reconciling the gravity of a serious sin against the neighbor with his system of remissible and irremissible sin. We are not aware that there is any passage in Tertullian's works which would construct fraud as not being a sin directly against the neighbor. If there should be a different explanation of this term which would eliminate the difficulty mentioned above and thereby place fraud among the *delicta in dominum* we should undoubtedly gain a much clearer concept of Tertullian's system of sin classification. Until some such solution is offered, the reader of Tertullian's *De Pudicitia* will, we believe, be impressed with the inconsistency of his division of sin in so far as the division according to remissibility and irremissibility appears to be a forced one. The accusation of insincerity and willful misleading of his readers,

<sup>16</sup> "Pud." 21, Oehler I, p. 842, lines 5 sqq.: Nam tibi quae in te reatum habeant etiam septuagies septies iuberis indulgere in persona Petri.

which has been insinuated by D'Alès<sup>17</sup>, is not removed but rather aggravated by the manipulation of concepts to serve the end of argument rather than to meet the requirements of veracity.

If, then, we assume that the clause: *quae in ipsum fuerint admissa, et in templum eius* is not restrictive in the sense just considered, but explanatory, we have an element in the Tertullianic concept of the term *mortal* which gives us a better insight into the extent of the matter that comes under the title of *delicta ad mortem*, or *delicta mortalia*. With reference to the first class of sin, those *in dominum*, we may well reckon idolatry among them.<sup>18</sup> Blasphemy, also, and denial of faith may be placed in that class. Whether the *blasphemia* and *negatio* are to be considered as distinct species of sin is not a settled matter. *Negatio* seems to be another term for apostasy.<sup>19</sup> Blasphemy taken in the sense of *blasphemia spiritus*<sup>20</sup> would be a more intense degree, perhaps, of *negatio*. Of course, if it is taken in the sense of *Mark II*, 7,<sup>21</sup> it bears a most distinct stamp of a *delictum in dominum*.

The sin of murder causes some difficulty as to its classification. D'Alès considers it under the heading of sins committed directly against God.<sup>22</sup> Naturally enough, he finds it difficult to consider murder a *delictum in deum*, but sees a feebly plausible solution in the reflection that man is the image of God and that, consequently, murder is directed at least against the image. But why not make a distinction between sins *in fratrem* and sins *in templum dei*? Why could murder not be considered a *delictum in templum dei* rather than a sin *in*

<sup>17</sup> "L'Édit. de Call.," pp. 198, 199.

<sup>18</sup> D'Alès, "L'Édit. de Call." p. 209.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 208.

<sup>20</sup> Bingham, "Antiquities," Vol. VI, pp. 327 sqq., Oxford, 1855.

<sup>21</sup> "Why doth this man speak thus? he blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins, but God only?"

<sup>22</sup> D'Alès, "L'Édit. de Call." p. 209.

*fratrem?* That would obviate the difficulty D'Alès proposes. It is true that murder is objectively considered always a *delictum in fratrem* but it cannot be asserted that the *delicta in fratrem*, in the Tertullianic sense, covered our present view of such sins as they are in objective reality.

It would appear from *Pud.* 21 that *delicta in fratrem* are principally sins against charity as such, also, most probably, sins against justice as such. The impression one gains from reading the chapter mentioned is that the sins *in fratrem* are those that are mentioned in *Matth.* XVIII, 21sq. and in *Luke* XVII, 4. It is not necessary to restrict the expression *delicta in templum dei* to the sins against chastity, although we admit that from the enumeration of the *delicta exitiosia* in *Pud.* 19 it would seem most appropriate. The ultimate reason for the malice of murder is not mentioned in any work of Tertullian, and there is no context that would give us an insight into his mind on this question. The reason given for assuming murder to be a sin against God, namely because man is the image of God, is in itself no more urgent than the reason for assuming murder to be a sin against God's temple, namely, the fact that the body has been consecrated in baptism to the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

That sins of impurity are considered *delicta in templum dei* is apparent from various passages of Tertullians' works.<sup>24</sup> What sins of impurity are precisely to be considered as *violatio templi dei* is not so definite as to extent. We do not enter here in the question as to the differences between the various sins of impurity, as for instance, whether the concept of fornication in the day of Tertullian differed from the one conveyed by the present day textbook definition. We wish to give merely a

<sup>23</sup> Compare, in reference to the latter reason, the two texts from Scripture which Tertullian has adduced as mutually interpretative: I "Cor." VI, 15: Non scitis corpora vestra membra sunt Christi? quia et Christus dei templum. "John" II, 19: Evertite templum hoc, et ego illud in triduo resuscitabo.—"Pud." 16, Oehler I, p. 827, lines 8 sqq. Compare also "Pud." 6, Oehler I, p. 802, line 25, p. 803, lines 1 sqq.—As to the meaning of templum dei as the Christian community see D'Alès, op. cit., loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup> E. g. "Pud." 6, Oehler I, p. 803, lines 3 sqq. "Pud." 16, ibid., p. 827, lines 10 sqq. "Cult. Fem." II, 1, ibid. p. 714, lines 6 sqq.



general outline of the sins that would come under the heading which Tertullian termed *mortalia delicta in templum dei*. Adultery, fornication and several other sins of impurity come under this title.<sup>25</sup> Do sins of impure thought or desire violate the temple of God according to Tertullian's view? We are not aware that in his work *De Pudicitia* there is any indication of his opinion on this matter. From chapter 4 however we may deduce with some certainty that the sins against the temple of God are to be understood as sins of deed. In this chapter he expressly takes up the question as to the gravity of sin: *censum delictorum, an ea sint quae veniam ab hominibus consequi possint*.<sup>26</sup> No mention is made of sins other than those of deed. Even clandestine marriages are censured as subject to the danger of being judged by the same standard as *moechia* and *fornicatio*.<sup>27</sup> He concludes his remark on the scope of adultery and fornication with classifying other frenzies of impure passions as monstrosities.<sup>28</sup>

The expression *ultra jura naturae*, obviously leaves room for speculation, at least if we consider it from the angle from which Tertullian could have viewed it, especially in his Montanistic period. It would seem that by the expression he meant all sins of impurity against nature, *contra jura naturae*, but since his Montanistic attitude colored his views with rigorism and especially his views on matters relating to chastity, it is impossible to state exactly what crimes he included among the monstrosities.

It would be interesting to know what his views were on masturbation, but since there is nowhere in his works mention made of this sin, we can only make a probable deduction as to his opinion on it from passages dealing

25 "Apol." XI, Oehler I, p. 159, lines 10, 11: incesti in sorores et maritarum adulteri et virginum raptores et puerorum contaminatores.

26 "Pud." 4, Oehler I, p. 797.

27 Ibid. op. cit., p. 798.

28 Ibid. Reliquas autem libidinum furias impias et in corpora et in sexus ultra jura naturae, non modo limine, verum omni ecclesiae tecto submovemus, quia non sunt delicta, sed monstra.

either with sins against chastity in general or with sins that bear some similiarity with self-abuse, such as pederasty. Judging from the ordinary severity with which Tertullian treats all sins of impurity and the temptations that lead thereto, we would be inclined to believe that he considered self-abuse as a violation of the temple of God which needed no special mention. If we analyze the closing sentence of chapter 4: *Reliquas autem libidinum furias* etc. we do not believe that we would place it among the monstrosities. For can we interpret *reliquas libidinum furias* so as to include self-abuse? If we compare other passages in which the term *furia* is used we find that it has an element of scandal or of sinning with others that aggravates its malice. Thus for instance we find the term used in *Apol.* 6: *licet Baccho iam Italico furias vestras immoletis*,<sup>29</sup> likewise in *Apol.* 37: *Ipsis Bacchanalium furiis nec mortuis parcunt Christianis*.<sup>30</sup> Then, too, the term would seem to be a misnomer for self abuse.

Since we cannot well bring self-abuse under the sins described by Tertullian as monstrosities and find no place for it among the ordinary sins against chastity, we are brought to the probable conclusion that the sins Tertullian delt with especially in *Pud.* were sins that came under the observation of others, sins that were not strictly private. It is perhaps this reason which led Tertullian to omit the mention of self-abuse in *Pud.* Why he omitted mentioning it in other works can, as insinuated above, be a matter of conjecture only. Whether he comprehended it under the term *mollities* remains likewise hidden to investigation.

Of course the clause, *si qua alia violatio templi dei* in *Pud.* 19, is rather broad and includes in a general way the sins against purity. The proximity of the conditional clause to the mention of *moechia* and *fornicatio* in-

<sup>29</sup> Oehler I, p. 136, lines 13, 14.—*Furiae* is here well translated with "orgies" in "Anf." III, p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> Oehler I, p. 249, line 21. The translation in "Anf." III, p. 45, is not so well rendered: "with the frenzy of the Bacchanals."

clines us to accept the expression *violatio templi dei* in this passage as referring to sins of impurity, though we have our doubts about making this an exclusive interpretation, since *violatio templi dei*, as we have shown above, could include murder, and sins against the fifth commandment. The expression, in all probability, fluctuated as to its conceptual content and must accordingly be judged principally from the context. If we are to believe that the enumeration of sins in chapter 19 of *Pud.* (the *delicta exitiosa*) is an adequately complete one, then we must interpret the clause *si qua alia violatio templi dei* as having a definite meaning, that is, we must take it to stand for some other sin or sins besides *moechia* and *fornicatio*. Tertullian is not concerning himself in *Pud.* with *monstra*, sins, that are *ultra jura naturae*. Thus the sin or sins comprehended by the clause in question lie between the sins *citra jura naturae*, namely *moechia* and *fornicatio*, and those *ultra jura naturae*.

There is unfortunately no passage in Tertullian that would permit us to construe his view on what constitutes a sin that is not *ultra naturae*. A passage in *Ad Nationes* I,<sup>31</sup> c. 4: *Ipsi suam licuit in perversum demutare naturam, mulieri non permisit in melius reformari*, is in a context that permits of a varied interpretation and consequently cannot be adduced as decisive in the question before us. The passages from *Adv. Marc.* V, 15<sup>32</sup>: *Lex naturae luxuriae est, turpiaudini quoque et immunditiae contraria*, and *Libido autem nec apud gentes matrimonio adscribitur, sed extra-ordinariis et non naturalibus et portentuosus* are not definite enough to give the concept required.<sup>33</sup> Speaking of the reverence due the naturalness of the reproductive process, Tertullian expresses himself rather unclear on the extent of natural law: *Natura veneranda est, non erubescenda. Concu-*

31 Oehler I, p. 312 lines 16, 17.

32 Oehler II, p. 319, lines 13 sqq.

33 There are various readings of this passage. Oehler's is followed by "Anf." The following reading gives the opposite sense of Oehler's: *Luxuria est turpitudini quoque et immunditiae non contraria*. Cf. Oehler Vol. II, p. 319 footnote.



*bitum libido, non condicio foedavit. Excessus, non status est impudicus, siquidem benedictus status apud deum; Crescite et in multitudinem proficite. Excessus vero maledictus, adulteria et stupra et lupanaria. In hoc itaque sollemni sexuum officio quod marem ac feminam miscet, in concubitu dico communi, scimus et animam et carnem simul fungi, animam concupiscentia, carnem opera, animam instinctu, carnem actu.*<sup>34</sup> Here the excessive is contrasted with the natural. Adultery and other sins of impurity are mentioned as excesses. Sodomy and bestiality are plainly condemned in accordance with *Leviticus* XX, 13, 15 as monstrosities and as *ultra jura naturae*.<sup>35</sup>

While we cannot state with any precision the concept of Tertullian on the extent of natural law in the matter of chastity, we may conclude with plausible certainty that he considered sodomy and bestiality as against nature, and, most probably, such sins as mutual abuse.<sup>36</sup>

We have attempted to give an outline of the sins in the Tertullianic sense of the term *mortal*. The enumeration must of its very nature be incomplete since the term *mortal* supplanting the Scriptural phrase *ad mortem* had a different concept among the Psychics than it did among the Pneumatics. Even Tertullian looked upon the term, or better said, its contents in a changing light as time passed and his opinions changed from his moderate Catholic interpretation of Christian morality to narrow-minded Montanism.

To return briefly to the consideration of the passage

34 "Anim." 27, Oehler II, p. 600, lines 8 sqq.

35 "Adv. Marc." I, c. 29. Oehler II, p. 82, lines 20 sqq: *morte punientis et incestam, sacrilegam atque monstrosam in masculos et in pecudes libidinum insaniam*. The *insania incesta* refers to "Lev." XX, 12, 14 et al., *ibid.*, the *insania sacrilega* most probably to "Lev." XX 2-5. It would appear from this passage of Tertullian that incestuous and sacrilegious intercourse are not, in his opinion, against nature, if we may judge Tertullian to have used *monstrum* both here and in "Pud." 5 in the same sense. There is no apparent reason to believe that the concept varied in his writings. —Cf. "De Pallio IV, Oehler I, p. 934, line 1, p. 935, line 5.

36 "De Pallio" IV, Oehler I, p. 942—"Res. Carn." c. 16. Oehler II, p. 487.

in which the explanatory clause *quae in ipsum fuerint admissae et in templum eius*. We have stated that it is most probably to be taken in the sense we have offered in the preceding pages. It will be seen from the consideration brought forth above that the clause cannot easily be accepted as a definition. It is evidently not a definition in the strict sense of the term, for it does not give us any of the fundamental elements of the concept. It mentions merely the *objecta circa quae* of transgressions that are mortal, but the substance of the concept of mortal sin is not stated. Since the object, however, may be considered a determining factor of the gravity, there is some justification in assuming that Tertullian wished to give in a few words the outlines of what he understood to be mortally sinful. This is not improbable in view of the fact that the Scriptural phrase does not occur in the immediate context. Mere contrast to the sins mentioned as *delicta in fratrem* would not require, at least in the context as it exists, the presence of a relative clause.

The investigation to which we have subjected the passages in which Tertullian used the term *delicta mortalia* has sufficiently indicated the concept he sought to convey thereby, namely a mere substitute for the concept of the Scriptural term *delicta ad mortem*. Of course, the concept receives its proper modification, a substantial one too, as to its extent, from the Montanistic attitude of Tertullian. Since the word *mortal* does not occur in the non-Montanistic works of Tertullian there is ground for speculative suspicion as to its sudden appearance in *Pud.* Hence we should proceed cautiously in judging of its import in the time of Tertullian.

Abstracting from the arguments we have offered in the various considerations of the contexts accompanying the use of the term, we believe there is considerable weight in the circumstances we have just mentioned, namely the absence of the term in Tertullian's non-Montanistic works, for the opinion we have advanced. The term *mortal*, we repeat, was not, in our opinion, an ac-

cepted term of theological science in Tertullian's time. We do not deny however that it was Tertullian's purpose to coin the term for the Montanistic concept which he attached to the Scriptural phrase. No doubt, he realized the position of leader, which he enjoyed, and saw the influence his writings would have on his own age and even on following generations. It need not surprise us, therefore, to find Tertullian establishing a school of theological thought and giving form and life to theological concepts. It is perhaps in this very fact that we find an explanation of Tertullian's change from the period of Catholicism through the Semi-Montanistic half-decade to the determined Montanistic position he adopted in later years. The eminence his writings gave him led him to believe that his opinions were final and his arguments unassailable in the field of theology.<sup>37</sup>

37 Such, at least, is the psychological solution we consider as most satisfactory in explaining the determination that we find underlying the defense of Montanism in "Fuga in Pers.," "Jei. adv. Psych.," "Pud."—"D'Alès, La Théol. de Tert.," p. 497, writes: Saint Jérôme assure que Tertullian fut en butte aux mauvais procédés des clercs romains, qu'il rend plus ou moins responsables de sa chute. Nous ne pouvons pas vérifier cette assertion; mais il est clair que des froissements d'amour-propre s'ajoutèrent aux tendances montanistes pour accélérer la crise, et nous constatons les ravages produits dans l'âme de l'irascible apologiste. On le savait coutumier des assertions tranchantes; désormais il s'exaspère sous la contradiction, jusqu'à énoncer les plus monstrueux paralogismes. Profondément aigri, bientôt il retourne contre les psychici les mêmes calomnies que jadis il repoussait avec indignation. Si l'âpreté du caractère fut le facteur principal de cette décadence nous voyons que l'esprit en subit le contre-coup.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## CATHOLIC CONCEPT OF MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN IN TERTULLIAN'S WORKS.

As we have seen in the preceding pages, the expression *mortal sin* in Tertullianic terminology does not convey the concept which present day Catholic theology signifies thereby. Tertullian meant merely the qualification of certain sins which, according to his assumption, Scripture conveys in the expression *delictum ad mortem*. He attached to its use the meaning of irremissibility of certain sins, which God alone could pardon, for which there was during this life no remission, but penance only. Catholic theology expresses by the term *mortal sin* the concept of an offense against God which causes the spiritual death of the soul. The term *mortal*, therefore, applies both in Tertullianic and Catholic theology to an effect of a serious sin rather than to the nature itself of the transgression.

If we state that the Tertullianic and Catholic concepts of mortal sin differ, we do not wish to state thereby that the concepts are absolutely at variance. There are some aspects in which they are co-extensive. One of the aspects we have just mentioned. For the sake of clearness it will be well to enter into the consideration of some of the elements of both the Tertullianic and the Catholic concept.

The terminology Tertullianic and Catholic applies to an effect of the sin. Tertullian uses *mortal* in the literal sense, wishing to express by the term the irremissibility of sin before physical death. Catholic theology uses *mortal* in a figurative sense and applies the term to the loss of sanctifying grace, the life of the soul. Tertullian has a synonym for *mortal*, but that again refers to an effect of the sin. Tertullian calls the sins that receive no pardon *exitiosa*, *graviora*, but these terms are used in passing and in a merely explanatory sense. Catholic theology, in using a synonym for *mortal*, applies a term that can also refer to the nature of the transgression,

namely *peccatum grave*. Tertullian bases the use of his term on the Scriptural expression *delictum ad mortem* and makes the content and extent of the concept contingent upon a debatable interpretation of the Scriptural text in which the expression occurs. Catholic theology has not based the use of it on the Scriptural passage in question, or better said, it does not refer to that passage for an explanation of mortal sin, and, consequently, does not make the concept depend upon the Scriptural meaning of I John V, 16. Tertullian, moreover, describes by the term *mortal* an effect that is not immediate, whereas Catholic theology signifies by the term a direct and immediate effect. The effect which Tertullian stresses is the attitude which God assumes toward the sinner in the eventuality of the sinner's petition for forgiveness, the effect stressed by *mortal* in the Catholic sense is the condition of soul into which the sinner falls *hic et nunc*. Incidentally, Tertullian emphasizes by his use of the term that attitude of God towards sin in general which Catholic theology stresses in terming non-mortal sin venial.

With all these differences there are points of similarity represented by the Tertullianic *delictum mortale* and Catholic theology's term *peccatum mortale*. Underlying both concepts we find the transgression of a grave commandment. As to this there can be no doubt for anyone who has only a superficial knowledge of Catholic doctrine and a mere reading acquaintance with Tertullian's work *De Pudicitia*. Tertullian himself applies to *delictum mortale* the description conveyed by the term *graviora*. If we admit that in chapter 19 of *Pud.* Tertullian refers, by the use of *graviora* and *exitiosa*, to two different classes of sin, and that only the latter are to be considered *delicta mortalia*, we would have of course an argument *a fortiori*, since then mortal sins contain a still greater degree of gravity than those termed *delicta graviora*. Implicitly in the Tertullianic concept the spiritual death of the grievous offender is contained, as is evidenced by the effect of the transgression in the eyes of God. If we recall briefly the contents of a passage in *Pud.* 7 on the expulsion of the sinner guilty of grievous transgression

(*moechia, fornicatio*) from the Church, we shall find there just this element of spiritual death, upon which Tertullian lays stress in the passages concerning *delicta mortalia*. In *Pud.* 7 he speaks of the sinner who is pronounced dead immediately upon commission of the crime of impurity. *Moechum vero et fornicatorem quis non mortuum statim admisso pronuntiavit?*<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted here that Tertullian strives to make the effect of mortal sin more vivid by showing its immediate result on the relation between the sinner and the Christian community. We are not prepared to state in what the ceremonial formality of expulsion from the Christian community consisted, but it will suffice here to know that the figurative use of the term *mortuus* referred to the symbolical death, which did not mean the mere separation from communion with other Christians, but also, as is clear from Tertullian's explanation of remission of mortal sins for the next life contingent upon a penance not practiced in vain<sup>2</sup> in this, the separation from communion with God. In the Catholic concept of the term *mortal* the effect of spiritual death is fundamental.

The concept of the Tertullianic term is not so extensive as is that of Catholic theology. Tertullian wishes to apply *mortal* merely to some grievous transgressions of divine law, namely those for which there is no forgiveness in this life. The Catholic term mortal is co-extensive with all grievous transgression. What sins are precisely *mortal* in the Tertullianic sense has been considered above under the classifications of sins *in deum, in fratrem, and in templum dei*.

The term *mortal sin*, as used by Tertullian and Catholic theologians, has, therefore, some points of difference and some of similarity. From the investigation into the terminology we have found that the concept of mortal sin, as taught in Catholic doctrine, cannot be gotten in its entirety, nor in those aspects, according to which it is contrasted with venial sin, from Tertullian's use of the term *mortal*. It remains to be seen whether the Catholic con-

1 "Pud." 7, Oehler II, 805, lines 19 sqq.

2 'Pud. 3.



cept of grievous sin, principally in its contra-distinction of venial, finds support in Tertullian's works, or whether the non-Catholic contention can be substantiated, namely, that tradition knows of no sin that is not mortal *ex natura sua*.

In dealing with the latter contention we find no explicit statement in Tertullian's work that would serve as a basis for the denial of a distinction between mortal and venial sin. (In using henceforth the term *mortal* we wish to express thereby the Catholic concept of grievous sin, unless otherwise expressly stated). If Tertullian expressly taught that all sins were mortal, we should obviously find some element in the definition of sin which would offer a reason for the denial of the distinction. We recall here the passage from which we took Tertullian's definition of sin: *id peccato deputandum a quo Deus arceat*.<sup>3</sup> In explanation of the definition Tertullian adds: *quoniam, cum Deum grande quid bonum constet esse, utique bono nisi malum non displiceret, quod inter contraria sibi nulla amicitia est*.<sup>4</sup>

No one would seriously state that the last clause of the explanatory sentence just quoted is precisely an argument that denies the distinction of gravity. For it is the mere contrast between good and evil as explanatory of the contrast between God and sin that is mentioned, and that too, along very general lines.. The Catholic doctrine does not deny that venial sin is an evil or that it displeases God. It is obvious that sin, not the sinner, is the object of God's hatred, that consequently there can be no friendship between God and sin. Friendship applies to persons primarily. Tertullian uses friendship here in a sense equivalent to compatibility. The metaphorical use of the term in an abstract axiomatic statement as the one quoted, does not contribute to precision either of thought or of expression. In the present instance it is misleading, since the expression *nulla amicitia* might incline the reader to believe that the sinner is meant, not the sin. On second thought, however, one will readily understand that Tertullian is dealing only with an abstract concept,

<sup>3</sup> "Paen." III, 2, de Labriolle, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

not with the concrete application of the enunciated principle to actual transgressions, light or grave. Granted that in the passage quoted Tertullian considers sin in the sinner *de facto* and that the principle: *inter contraria sibi nulla amicitia est* is to be interpreted as excluding the existence of non-mortal sins, there would still remain to be demonstrated that Tertullian is here dealing with penance in general, and not with penance as applicable to the graver faults only. If Tertullian speaks here of penance as applicable to the graver sins the conclusion is not improbable that in speaking of sin as the cause or occasion of penance his explanatory remarks would refer to such sin as would be proportionate to the penance treated. A serious objection cannot be made on the supposition that Tertullian is treating penance and sin in general, and that, hence, his brief digression on sin is applicable to all sin. For that supposition would, as stated above, still have to be verified. We need not enter, however, on these speculative questions, since the obvious reading of the text quoted may easily be interpreted as referring also to non-mortal sin.

Tertullian's concept of grievous sin, as present day Catholic theologians understand the concept, may be best obtained from a study of his comparative lists of sins. In these various lists we see Tertullian predicating explicitly or implicitly a degree of gravity concerning certain sins, which will permit us a fair insight into his view on the distinction between grievous and light transgression. With the exception of the passage from *Pud.* 7 we have in one or more of the preceding studies become acquainted with the contents of the passages which we will quote in full.

We call attention to the fact that all the passages are taken from the Montanistic work, *De Pudicitia*, which writing of Tertullian gives us so many angles of view into his doctrines and those of his opponents, the Psychics. Since this work was written with the express purpose of defending the Montanistic belief concerning the irremissibility of certain sins, it is to be expected that the degree of gravity in the classes of sins called irremissible was

not necessarily changed. The rigorism, of course, that was inherent in Montanism, would lead us to believe that all sins, no matter of what gravity, would be looked upon in a more severe light by its adherents than by the Psychics. The raising of certain sins to the standard of irremissibility would naturally raise the whole scale of sins to a higher level of gravity. We would be inclined to believe this all the more since we find Tertullian condemning second nuptials as illicit and sinful. Granting for the sake of illustration that entering upon a second marriage has the appearance of an imperfection, we can easily see how the trend of rigorism in Tertullian's doctrine would make a sin of the imperfection. It is quite difficult, however, to see why this imperfection was quite disproportionately branded a fault more grievous than the sins lower on the scale. The general attitude of Montanistic rigorism would not explain this difficulty, although there is some basis for an explanation in Tertullian's extreme position toward things sexual, licit or illicit. But Montanism in all its rigorism had to reckon with frailty and with laws, the importance of which could not be stressed too much for fear that the precepts considered most binding would appear unnaturally severe. The Catholic concept of non-mortal sin is so logical and fits so symmetrically into the general system of Christian morality that the mind of Tertullian, Montanistic and ultra-ascetical though it was, saw no reason to expunge the distinction between grievous and non-grievous sin.

The texts to be considered are as follows: *Perit igitur et fidelis elapsus in spectaculum quadrigarii furoris et gladiatorii cruoris et scenicae foeditatis et xysticae vanitatis, aut si in lusus, in convivia saecularis sollemnitatis, in officium, in ministerium alienae idolatriae aliquas artes adhibuit curiositatis, si in verbum ancipitis negationis aut blasphemiae impegit. Ob tale quid extra gregem datus est, vel et ipse forte ira, tumore, aemulatione, quod denique saepe fit, dedignatione castigationis abruptit. Debet requiri atque revocari. Quod potest recuperari, non perit nisi foris perseveraverit.*<sup>5</sup> The second text to

5 "Pud." 7, Oehler I, p. 805, lines 9 sqq.



be examined is as follows: *Quaedam delicta cotidianae incursionis, quibus omnes simus objecti. Cui enim non accidet aut irasci inique, et ultra solis accasum, aut et manum immittere, aut facile maledicere, aut temere iurare, aut fidem pacti destruere, aut verecundia aut necessitate mentiri? In negotiis, in officiis, in quaestu, in victu, in visu, in auditu quanta tentamur? ut si nulla sit venia istorum, nemini salus competat. Horum ergo erit venia per exortorem patris Christum.*<sup>6</sup> The third text reads as follows: *Sunt autem et contraria istis, ut graviora et exitiosa, quae veniam non capiant, homicidium, idololatria, fraus, negatio, blasphemia, utique et moechia et fornicatio, et si quae alia violatio templi dei... Horum ultra exortator non erit Christus; haec non admittet omnino qui natus ex deo fuerit, non futurus dei filius, si admiserit.*<sup>7</sup>

It is the purpose of the following pages to subject these texts to a detailed investigation both as to textual and contextual content. An unbiased study of their mutually explanatory relation will, we are firmly convinced, bring to light that Tertullian cannot be quoted as supporting the denial of a distinction between mortal and venial sin. Nor are we contented with this merely negative result, but we do believe there is sufficient basis in Tertullian's writings for the positive doctrinal concept of the distinction.

We might add here for the sake of clearness in the *status questionis* the various explanations of the term *mortal* and *venial* that could be of some value in the construction of Tertullian's concept of grievous and non-grievous sins. The Catholic doctrine considers mortal sin *ex parte substantiae actus* a word, deed, or desire against the eternal law, *ex parte defectus* an aversion from God, the ultimate end of man, by voluntary conversion to a changeable good.<sup>8</sup> Venial sin on the contrary does not destroy the *principium ordinis* by aversion from God, the ultimate end, and hence must be considered an

6 "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 837, lines 31, 32, p. 838, lines 1 sqq.

7 Ibid. op. cit., loc. cit., lines 6 sqq.

8 Billot, "Disquisitio de Natura et Ratione Peccati Personalis," p. 35, Rome, 1897.

act that is not *contra legem aeternam*, but merely *prae-ter*. *Principium ordinis* we understand to mean sanctifying grace either *in se* or in its manifestation, such as the desire to serve God out of perfect charity.<sup>9</sup> Etymologically, venial sin means merely pardonable sin. A second consideration places the term *venial* sin before us as meaning any sin which calls for less punishment because of mitigating circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Finally, venial sin of its own nature contains in itself the cause for complete forgiveness (*quantum est de se habet causam veniae totalis*) since it deserves temporary chastisement only and not eternal punishment. It is in this sense, principally, that venial sin is *contra-distinguished* to mortal sin.

The three passages adduced above show at least three degrees of sin. The first passage describes that degree of gravity which attaches to those sins that place the sinner outside the pale of the faithful, but not forever. A Christian, who is guilty of one or more sins there mentioned, is driven from the flock, (*extra gregem datus est*). That the excommunication here described is not metaphorical in explanation of the parable concerning the lost sheep is quite conclusively demonstrable from Tertullian's further elucidations. The separation from the flock is sometimes effected by the guilty one himself, who apparently does not wait for an announcement on the part of the authorities. *Ipse forte ira, tumore, aemulatione, quod denique saepe fit, dedignatione castigationis abruptit*.<sup>11</sup> Such a sinner always has a chance of being recalled.

He, however, who has been guilty of adultery or fornication can never be recalled. He perishes in the strict sense. What the strict sense of *perire* is may be gather-

9 Cf. Billot op. cit., p. 108: *principium ordinis quod est charitas super omnia Deo adhaerens*.

10 Billot op. cit., pp. 105, 106.—*Sic peccata mortalia, quae ex infirmitate sive passione fiunt, quandoque dicuntur venialia, non quidem simpliciter, sed secundum quid, et comparative ad ea quae ex certa malitia procedunt*. Cf. Waldmann, "Zur theol. Begründung der laesslichen Suende," II, (on doctrine of St. Thomas), "Tq." pp. 153 sqq., Tübingen 1917/18.

11 "Pud." 7, Oehler I, p. 805. Cf. "Adv. Valentin," c. 4: *de ecclesiae authenticæ regula abruptit*.

ed from the principle enunciated by Tertullian in the context: *Quod potest recuperari, non perit nisi foris perseveraverit.*<sup>12</sup> Remaining outside the flock for life is equivalent to "death." Perseverance in separation from the flock would have the same effect as adultery and fornication, according to the Montanistic view. The separation of a sinner guilty of some sin mentioned in the category quoted above (*Pud.* 7) is merely temporary, not perpetual, as in the case of adulterers and fornicators. The same principle gives us also the broad sense of *perire* which Tertullian explicitly mentioned in the preceding sentence: *Licet enim perisse dicatur, erit et de perditionis genere retractare, quia et ovis non moriendo, sed errando, et drachma non interiando, sed latitando perierunt. Ita licet dici perisse quod salvum est.*<sup>13</sup>

The point Tertullian wished to make is this, that at all events *perire*, as interpreted by the Psychics in the parables under discussion, is not equivalent to the *perire* which goes with sins of the flesh. Both kinds of sinners, the one guilty of attending the gladiatorial fights, for instance, and the other guilty of adultery, are said to perish, both by Tertullian and the Psychics, but the Psychics go too far, according to Tertullian, in placing the latter class on a par with the former when they permit the latter to be recalled. It is apparent then that Tertullian and the Psychics consider both kinds of sinners guilty of serious offense.

That there can be no question as to the seriousness of sins mentioned in the category of *Pud.* 7 is quite deducible from the fact that Tertullian admits that the guilt causes the sinners to perish, and forever, too, if they remain in the state of separation. Then, too, the consideration, that Tertullian chose as examples to demonstrate his interpretation of the ewe and drachma parables such sins that both he and the Psychics would admit as causes of perishing, proves the contention that the sins in the category mentioned were of a grievous nature. This becomes still more evident since Tertullian permits, appar-

<sup>12</sup> "Pud." 7, Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Pud." 7, Ibid.



ently with a purpose, his readers to conclude that the Psychics considered sins of the flesh equally remissible with sins of the category of *Pud.* 7.

But can it be said definitely that Tertullian's view of the sins in this list imply substantially the doctrinal concept of Catholic theology concerning grievousness of sin? The prerequisites knowledge and freewill do not, as may readily be granted from a glance at the nature of some of the sins mentioned, give any cause for doubt.<sup>14</sup> Whether the *gravis materia* is also present in the Tertullianic concept must be gathered from his discussion of the sins here mentioned. His work *De Spectaculis* gives us a sufficient insight into his view of the gravity of the sins he links up with the attendance at the shows. There are four kinds

<sup>14</sup> We need not enter into a detailed discussion of all the sins mentioned in the category of "Pud." 7. The last two, however, might give rise to some doubt as to the presence of the prerequisites: Si in verbum ancipitis negationis aut blasphemiae impegit. Oehler calls attention to the substitution of negationis for negotiationis in our present text. Latinus is to be commended for the substitution, according to Fr. Iunius. Solebant infirmi amphilogiis interdum martyrium declinare. Fr. Iunius, as in footnote Oehler I, page 805. The word blasphemy is but an explicitation of negatio. Idem ibid. The notions of voluntarium simpliciter and voluntarium secundum quid will perhaps solve that difficulty, if we accept Oehler's text.

We might add that negatio and blasphemia are to be found on the list of delicta, quae veniam non capiunt in "Pud." 19. In "Pud." 7 however they are qualified by a term that seems to indicate a mitigating circumstance. Oehler's view of the additional aut blasphemiae, as synonymous with negatio, finds apparently no support after a comparison of the two categories. In "Pud." 19 negatio and blasphemia are not considered as synonyms, as is evident from the text reading, which to our knowledge has no variations that would give us reason to believe the two terms to be convertible. The mitigating term anceps belongs, in our opinion, both to negatio and blasphemia, and implies an element of involuntariness, such as theologians are wont to express by involuntarium secundum quid. The question would be much easier to solve if the meaning of negatio and blasphemia were a definitely settled matter.

From this consideration it is quite evident that Tertullian grasped and expressed the possibility of degrees of gravity even in those sins which he assigned generically to the class of irremissibilia. Sins that belong to this class could, therefore, under certain circumstances be classified as less intense and were not ex toto genere suo irremissible. To what sins of the class the possibility of mitigating circumstances can be extended, is not of importance here. It suffices to have established the fact that knowledge and voluntariness are presupposed as prerequisites in the category under consideration.

of shows he mentions in the passage quoted; namely, *quadrigarii furoris, gladiatorii cruoris, scenicae foeditatis, xysticae vanitatis*. If we turn to the chapters in *De Spectaculis* that deal with these various forms of public exhibitions we shall find these forms severely condemned as unworthy of a Christian, because of themselves and the ideas of heathen worship with which they are thoroughly permeated.<sup>15</sup> Even the trainer of gladiators is excluded from the Church<sup>16</sup> The *artes curiositatis* are essentially connected with superstition and idolatry.<sup>17</sup>

An objection to the above interpretation of Tertullian's view on the gravity of sin mentioned in the category of *Pud.* 7 could be brought from the latter part of the same chapter, in which certain sins are admittedly comparable in gravity to the size and weight of the drachma. *Licet esse aliqua delicta pro ipsius drachmae modulo ac pondere mediocria, quae ibidem delitescunt, mox ibidem et reperta, statim ibidem cum gaudio emendationis transigantur.*<sup>18</sup> Since the whole matter is one of comparison, which permits of several tenable explanations according to the viewpoints to be accommodated, a discussion of the expression *pro modulo ac pondere drachmae* will not lead to any definite results. One thing seems certain that the expression contains no definite proof of venial sin nor a basis for the denial thereof. Tertullian calls the sins compared with the small size and weight of the drachma *delicta mediocria*. Hence they are not to be considered *minima*. The *mediocria* here comprise either such sins as Tertullian has mentioned in the preceding category of the same chapter, or, and this seems very probable, sins that are, according to the supposition and trend of Tertullian's argument against the Psychics, grievous, but not so grievous as those which are mentioned in the category and which caused a temporary penance *extra gregem*.

We say it seems very probable. The text strongly fa-

<sup>15</sup> Cf. "Spec." 17, 18, 9.

<sup>16</sup> "Idol." 9, Oehler I, p. 84.—Bingham, "Antiquities," VI, p. 402.

<sup>17</sup> "Idol." 9. The variation in the text given by Oehler in footnote: *magicas artes* in place of *aliquas artes* corresponds better to the idea conveyed by *curiositatis*.

<sup>18</sup> "Pud." 7, Oehler I, p. 806, lines 10 sqq.

vors this division, the lowest, among the grievous sins. *Iuxta drachme quoque exemplum etiam intra domum dei ecclesiam licet esse aliqua delicta pro ipsius drachmae modulo ac pondere mediocria, quae ibidem delitescunt, mox ibidem et reperta, statim ibidem cum gaudio emendationis transigantur.*<sup>19</sup> Tertullian apparently does not wish to argue on the application of the two parables to those who are only temporarily lost and temporarily subject to *castigatio*, to which some not infrequently refuse to submit. He would apply the parables for the sake of demonstrating their plausible application in a sense other than would endanger his rigorism, to those who had sinned grievously but not to the extent of causing them to be put outside the fold even temporarily.

That there is question here of grievous sin is as we have said above the obvious conclusion from the general trend of the context and we believe from the very text itself: *Statim ibidem cum gaudio emendationis transigantur.* The Psychics had evidently applied the parables in question also to those guilty of *moechia* and *fornicatio*. Tertullian makes no denial of the implication that there is question of a serious loss, e. g., in the going astray of one sheep from the fold, but he does not admit that the loss is serious enough to apply the parable to the sinners guilty of *moechia* and *fornicatio*.<sup>20</sup>

If we grant, for the sake of clearing away further doubts concerning the content of the text quoted above on the *delicta pro drachmae modulo et pondere mediocria*, that Tertullian is merely adducing the words of the Psychics and not giving his own view, we can still adhere to the interpretation given, for Tertullian does not deny that such a class of sin exists. It is true, we cannot put much stress on such an argument *ex silentio*, but it has as much value as the supposition, that he is merely quoting the Psychics. As a matter of fact, the supposed or real quotation is of such a nature as to make it appear common

<sup>19</sup> "Pud." 7, Oehler I, p. 806, lines 9 sqq.

<sup>20</sup> "Pud." 7, Oehler I, p. 806, lines 13 sqq. *Moechiae vero et fornicationis, non drachma, sed talentum, quibus exquirendis non lucernae spiculo lumine, sed totius solis lancea opus est.*



ground for Tertullian and the Psychics. It would suffice, for the present, to prove that the concept existed at his time, namely that there were sins which were grievous, but not to the extent of exclusion from the Church.

Tertullian was quite willing to admit that there are sins of the gravity, just described, comparable to the size and weight of a drachma, but he was opposed to classifying *moechia et fornicatio* among them, as, he claimed, the Psychics did. There seems reason to believe, therefore, that Tertullian had a well developed concept of the various degrees of gravity in grievous sins. The fact that he treats the various sins in *Pud.* principally from the viewpoint of remissibility evidently does not exclude the fact that he also treats the sins, even though incidentally, from the viewpoint of objective, inherent gravity. The close relation between remissibility, or respectively, irremissibility, and the inherent gravity of serious sins permits of reasonable exactness in deductions concerning the nature of the gravity itself, especially in view of the indications given by the texts and the contexts.

The texts that we have thus far considered in *Pud.* 7 would give us three classes of grievous sin. The class of most grievous *delicta* comprises *moechia et fornicatio*, also all the *irremissibilia* by implication. Then, those sins which exclude for a time from the Church may be considered next in gravity of offense.<sup>21</sup> A still lower

21 As stated above, the *anceps negatio* and the *anceps blasphemia* give us reason to believe that Tertullian placed this class next to the *irremissibilia*, for among them he has enumerated sins which, considered in their full genus, belong to the *delicta irremissibilia*, but because of a mitigating circumstance drop into the next lower class of serious sins. Not only do we find proof for this in the mention of *anceps negatio* and *blasphemia*, but even sins of the flesh, typified in their fullness by *moechia et fornicatio* or *monstra*, are represented in the category by the expression: *speculaculo scenicae foeditatis*.

class of serious sins is to be found represented, very probably, by the *delicta mediocria* discussed above.<sup>22</sup>

On this basis of a distinction between the various classes of grievous sin we are able to build up a further consideration. The second passage quoted above as entering into the study of the difference between grievous and non-grievous sin is taken from Tertullian's discourse on texts from St. John, which he tries to harmonize for the purpose of avoiding a conflict between his rigorism and Scriptural teaching. The passage occurs in the much discussed *Pud.* 19. There seems to be much cause, indeed, for discussion. For a careful reading of the chapter will disclose the fact that Tertullian is laboring under serious difficulties in his heavy efforts to answer the objections, real or supposed, of the Psychics.<sup>23</sup>

The difficulty from St. John which leads on to the passage we are to investigate is the one arising from the

22 What sins precisely belong to this last class of serious sins is not mentioned by Tertullian. That in itself would be reason enough to doubt the existence of such a class of sins in Tertullian's mind. But then there are no urgent grounds to assume that every class of sins had to have its corresponding enumeration somewhere in Tertullian's works. No one will assert that the enumerations are complete. They are merely exemplary. The modifying adjective *aliqua* shows to some extent that Tertullian did not consider their number negligible. Their number was sufficient to form a basis for two of the parables, sufficient in fact, to meet the concept of remissibility, which the Psychics wished to associate with the interpretation of the parables.

23 We say real or supposed, because it is by no means a settled matter what part of the text can be quoted as originating from the pen of some Psychic apologist, or, perhaps, even from the edict of Callixtus. Still more, it is by no means established whether any part beyond a few words in "*Pud.*" I were to be found in the original edict, in a Psychic defense thereof, or in some Psychic discourse on the penitential discipline. It may easily be supposed that Tertullian himself put up the objections to clarify his standpoint. The objections, especially those taken from St. John, spontaneously suggested themselves to the minds of at least the better educated Christians, who with their thorough knowledge of Scripture would quite probably bring forth just such difficulties as are presented by Tertullian.—Cf. Morinus, "*Commentarius Historicus de Disciplina in Administratione Sacramenti Paenitentiae IX*," cc. 19, 20, pp. 459 sqq., Venice, 1702.—Esser, "*Die Busschriften Tertullians, De paenitentia und De Pudicitia und das Indulgenzedikt des Papstes Kallistus*," Programme of the University of Bonn, 1905.—Funk, "*Das Indulgenzedikt des Papstes Kallistus*," Tq., 1906, pp. 541 sqq.—Rolfs, "*Das Indulgenzedikt des roemischen Bischofs Kallist*," 1893.

texts: I *John* I, 8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"; I *John* III, 9, 10: "Whosoever is born of God committeth not sin; for his seed abideth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil. Whosoever is not just, is not of God, nor he that loveth not his brother." Tertullian sums up the objection by stating: *Iuxta est igitur ut excidisse sibi dicamus Ioannem in primore quidem epistola negantem nos sine delicto esse, nunc vero praescribentem non delinquere omnino, et illic quidem aliquid de venia blandientem, hic vero districte negantem filios dei quicumque deliquerint.*"<sup>24</sup> The objection here formulated is a quite natural exegetical question, and of itself looked both to Tertullian and the Psychics for a solution. It is not at all clear why Tertullian should have entered so thoroughly into the various exegetical difficulties, since the solutions he offers are, as their very explanation indicates, unsatisfactory, and do not appreciably strengthen the defense of his doctrine. While the lengthy excursus on the various Scriptural objections and, principally, those adduced above throws little light on the system of irremissible sins, it does incidentally give us a fair insight into the concept of several classes of sins, which fact favors the contention that the question of the nature and gravity of sin is closely allied with that of the remissibility or irremissibility of sin, and that, consequently, reasonably exact deductions concerning the nature and gravity of sin may be made from Tertullian's discussion of the latter question.

The solution which Tertullian offers to the objection he

<sup>24</sup> The variations in the readings here do not affect the substance of the text just quoted: "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 837, lines 25 sqq. "Anf." Vol. IV, p. 96, places this passage in quotation marks. The very reading of it will show that it is just as justifiable to consider the objection as placed by Tertullian himself. *Iuxta est igitur ut dicamus* is apparently in itself a probability against the supposition that Tertullian is quoting from some Psychic document. Then too, the very objections preceding the supposed quotation are of such a nature as to incline the reader to believe that Tertullian is merely placing a series of oratorical questions which, embracing obvious Scriptural objections, demand a reply.



or the Psychics formulated is based on a very important distinction of sins according to their gravity, namely, the *delicta cotidianae incursionis, quibus omnes simus obiecti* and the *delicta contraria istis, ut graviora et exitiosa*. For the moment we shall pass over the various considerations Tertullian gives these classes of sin to keep in view the general trend of his solution of the difficulty proposed.

Having drawn a distinction between various sins, Tertullian states with satisfaction that the distinction given solves well the difficulty arising from St. John: *Ita Ioannis ratio constabit diversitatis, distinctionem delictorum disponentis, cum delinquere filios dei nunc adnuit, nunc abnuit*.<sup>25</sup> The concluding thoughts of the chapter deal with the application of the answer given to *delicta non ad mortem* and *delicta ad mortem*. *Delicta non ad mortem* would apparently be *delicta cotidianae incursionis*, while *moechia* and *fornicatio* alone are mentioned as constituting *delicta ad mortem*. Above he had mentioned several others among the *exitiosa*. They are left out of consideration in the conclusion. The reason for this procedure in Tertullian's logic is a matter of conjecture. Did he wish to state that at all events *moechia et fornicatio* must be considered *delicta ad mortem*? If so, then the wording of his final sentences is not up to the standard of precision we have a right to expect from so thorough a writer.

As the text lies before us, a merely cursory reading of the lines in question will incline us to believe that all the sins he mentioned as *exitiosa* above (*homicidium, idololatria*, etc.) should have received some reference in the final remarks of the chapter.<sup>26</sup> Even though his main purpose in *Pud.* is to demonstrate the irremissibility of carnal sins, and consequently only they need be considered in his conclusion, still the quite distinctly felt omission of any reference to the other *delicta exitiosa* should have

25 "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 838, lines 11 sqq.

26 We mention *exitiosa* without the preceding term *graviora*, since we are not able to come to a conclusion as to whether Tertullian meant the two adjectives as descriptive of the same class, or whether he had two classes of sins in mind.

been avoided. In fact the impression grows that Tertullian himself is not sure of his ground and is groping about for an argument in his favor, that in the vagueness of the discussion he abruptly dispenses with the logical sequence of the various ideas developed in his argumentation and places before the Psychics a dilemma to rid himself of the burden of proving the original contention. Indeed the last sentence of the chapter in question begins with a rather sweeping statement: *Ita nihil iam superest*, and leaves to the reader the solution of the doubts that have arisen in his mind about the sequence of the argument and the existence of other *delicta exitiosa* which are completely ignored. The accusation of insincerity, which D'Alès insinuates in sufficiently strong terms,<sup>27</sup> is certainly not weakened by a perusal of the chapter here considered.

The *saltus*, however, which Tertullian makes in his argumentation does not obscure into untraceable vagueness the large outlines of the concepts we are investigating. There remains the expressly stated distinction between classes of sins that are separated by an infinite distance. There remain, too, sufficiently clear indications of the concepts which Tertullian attached to the discussion of the various classes of sin. Between the lines of the argument, which he, with legal technicalism and Scriptural insight, tries to shape in his favor, we find enough ground for the assertion we have made above concerning the basis for a denial or affirmation of a distinction between mortal and venial sin.

The passage we have quoted, which deals with *delicta cotidiana incursionis*, is not self explanatory. The mere wording of the passage under the obvious interpretation a Catholic reader would feel inclined to put on the text would, of course, have the appearance of prejudicial opinion. It is to the context, then, that we must look for a complementary exegesis of the text. One undeniable fact stands out quite eminent in the explanation which Tertullian adds to the distinction of sins in *delicta coti-*

<sup>27</sup> D'Alès, "L'Édit. de Calliste, p. 198.

*diana* and *delicta exitiosa*, and that fact is that the grace of God, the sonship of God, is lost only by committing the latter. We could not expect a clearer statement at the time of Tertullian as to the effect of sin, which is, beyond all doubt, mortal both according to Tertullian's terminology and concept of grievous sin.

The grievous sins we have investigated above in our discussion of the category in *Pud.* 7, are not considered here in *Pud.* 19. We would expect to see some reference to the application of the effect just mentioned, namely the loss of the sonship of God, to that class of sin for which the offender is at least temporarily separated from the sons of God as united in Christian communion. The fact that there is no reference to them does not of itself argue that only those guilty of *delicta exitiosa* lose the sonship of God. We have seen that Tertullian himself speaks of perishing in a broader sense when mentioning those guilty of a sin given in the category of *Pud.* 7. He does not deny that there is some element in common between those who are excluded temporarily and those excluded forever from the Church. The Psychics had applied, supposedly at least, the parable of the lost ewe and the lost drachma even to those guilty of *moechia* and *fornicatio*.

Tertullian was apparently not concerned about the effect *hic et nunc* on the soul of the offender. His contention was that the effect should not be removed by the Church. The lost sonship should not be restored to those guilty of *moechia* and *fornicatio*. He admits that the Church could do so, but according to him it is not her will.<sup>28</sup> It was therefore not sin as such which caused Tertullian to insist so strongly on his view, for, when pressed to give a satisfactory solution to the difficulty arising from the all-inclusive power given to Peter (*quaecunque*), he admitted that the Paraclete (*ecclesia spiritus per spiritalem hominem, non ecclesia numerus episcopo-*

28 "Pud." 21, Oehler I, pp. 842, 843. Sed habet, inquis, potestatem ecclesia delicta donandi. Hoc ego magis et agnosco et dispono, qui ipsum paracletum in prophetis novis habeo dicentem: Potest ecclesia donare delictum, sed non faciam, ne et alia delinquant.



*rum*, *Pud.* 21) could grant indulgence to all sin. The fear that forgiving such sins as *moechia et fornicatio* would lead to greater evils is, according to Tertullian's own words, the one reason why adulterers and fornicators are excluded forever from the Church.

The loss of the sonship of God, therefore, may be definitely considered as common to all who have offended to the extent of being excluded from the Church either temporarily or perpetually, and, in fact, as we have seen above, even those, who have failed seriously, but have not been excluded from the Church, are, as to the *perditio*, on a possible par with those who have been excluded temporarily. Tertullian in *Pud.* 7 gives the Psychics room to interpret the parable of the lost ewe and the lost drachma as appertaining to *delicta mediocria*. From these observations it will appear that Tertullian was far from denying the loss of the sonship of God in the case of those who committed *delicta* less grievous than the *delicta exitiosa*. Hence, irremissibility and loss of God's sonship were by no means co-extensively synonymous, and hence, sins of the remissible class (*Pud.* 7) also caused the loss of God's sonship. It is true that in the brief space of *Pud.* 19, in which explicit mention is made of this one effect of grievous sin, the impression is possibly gained that Tertullian meant the loss of the sonship of God as applicable only to the *delicta irremissibilia*. But upon thorough inspection not even the immediate context will bear out this impression, and still less will other passages, as seen above, be considered as favoring such a view. Tertullian himself is quite aware of the inadequacy of his interpretation, in which he seeks to reconcile the concepts from St. John: we all sin, we do not sin at all, those born of God do not sin. His admission has unconsciously slipped into the text:<sup>29</sup> *haec non admittet omnino qui natus ex deo fuerit, non futurus dei filius, si admiserit.*<sup>30</sup> . .

It is evidently a matter worthy of further consideration that Tertullian, in giving examples to demonstrate

<sup>29</sup> *Scl. delicta exitiosa.*

<sup>30</sup> "*Pud.*" 19, Oehler I, p. 838, lines 10, 11.

the solution of the Scriptural difficulty and at the same time the applicability of his doctrine, chose for the one part of the contrast sins, which he in no other part of his works mentions explicitly. These sins are the *delicta cotidiana*, sins which are obviously of a lighter degree than any he has named in other passages. Had he wished to bring out a list of sins in contrast to the *delicta irremissibilia* in order to demonstrate the existence of sins that could be pardoned by some church authority, he needed only repeat the category with which he had already acquainted his readers. The mention, merely in general, of sins remissible through the medium of the bishop<sup>31</sup>, would well have served that purpose since they are still fresh in the mind of the reader from the end of the preceding chapter.

What reason could Tertullian have for choosing just the lighter forms of sin and hence omitting reference, apparently with a purpose, to sins of a grievous, though not of the gravest, nature? If it was merely to interpret the words of St. John that we do sin and that we do not sin, then Tertullian has uselessly, not to say illogically, adduced the concept of forgiveness through the Suppliant of the Father and the concept of denial of sin. Forgiveness of sin, or non-forgiveness thereof, though these concepts constitute the underlying theme of the chapter, in fact of the whole work *De Pudicitia*, are not the controlling thought in this specific passage. They are, for the time, in the background, and the sonship of God and its loss, as the principal elements in solving the Scriptural difficulty, receive the most attention.

It is in conformity with these ideas, then, that Tertullian brings the list of *delicta cotidiana*. The mention of grievous sins without any reference whatever to the irremissible sins would well have served the purpose of Tertullian's explanation. For the demonstration, that the distinction between non-grievous and grievous sins would suffice to clear up the Scriptural difficulty, which had been brought more in consequence of putting Tertullian's doc-

31 "Pud." 18, ca. fin., Oehler I, p. 834.

trine to the test than because of any inherent exegetical obscurity, could easily have been turned to Tertullian's advantage. If Tertullian's doctrine aggravated the Scriptural difficulty in the eyes of the Psychics, then most assuredly the mere drawing of a distinction between the opposite effects, namely the continued possession of the sonship of God and the loss thereof, would have placed before them the very plausible viewpoint, according to which remissibility and irremissibility of sin did not in any way affect the act of sinning, and that hence the difficulty of the Psychics in as far as it based itself upon Tertullian's doctrine was beyond the question. But, instead of following this line of reasoning, Tertullian sought to develop the solution of the difficulty into an argument in his favor. The success or the failure of this attempt may be measured by the conviction one has on finishing a careful reading of the intricate nineteenth chapter.

Not much surprise do we experience in finding Tertullian summarizing his solution of the Scriptural difficulty: *Ita Ioannis ratio constabit diversitatis, distinctionem delictorum disponentis, cum delinquere filios dei nunc adnuit nunc abnuit.*<sup>32</sup> But his inconsistency becomes quite apparent, still more so, perhaps, his intention of forcing Scripture into his service, when he states: *Prospiciebat enim clausulam litterarum suarum, et illi praestruebat hos sensus dicturus in fine manifestius. Si quis scit fratrem suum delinquere delictum non ad mortem, postulabit, et dabit ei vitam dominus qui non ad mortem delinquit. Est enim delictum ad mortem; non de eo dico, ut quis postulet.*<sup>33</sup> No effort is made to explain the spontaneous objection that Tertullian, in his solution to the Scriptural difficulty, had stressed the *delicta exitiosa* as *irremissibilia*, while here the Scriptural text concerning the *delictum ad mortem* can on its face value be interpreted as meaning one crime only, not the seven or eight he had mentioned on the list of *delicta exitiosa*. The singling out of *moechia et fornicatio* rather increases the impression of inconsistency, though it is more in harmony with

<sup>32</sup> "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 838.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



the sense of the Scriptural reference to one *delictum ad mortem*. It is true, in the final sentence of the chapter he reverts to the use of the plural, *delicta mortalia, irremissibilia*. But that in itself does not dispel the impression of inconsistency, or inaccuracy, which one gains from the shifting to and fro from the singular to the plural. It is left to the reader to explain to himself, as best he can, the varying concepts of the author.

Tertullian has succeeded in giving a distinction which in itself would have sufficiently met the difficulty from St. John, but we cannot help seeing, in the additional effort to establish another argument in favor of his doctrine, an inconsistency, an inaccuracy, we might term it, which is not free from the taint of the forensic art of stretching an interpretation to carry a point. The text, we believe, will bear us out on this point, likewise, a fair and unprejudiced study thereof in its relation to the context and especially to the concluding lines of the chapter.

The interpretation which shows that Tertullian is not merely defending his viewpoint but is also adducing the concepts of grievous sin and of non-grievous sin is quite in harmony with the scope of his purpose in that particular passage. His primary aim is the solution of the Scriptural objection in question. His solution could substantially be accepted by the Psychics, too, for the distinction Tertullian makes between grievous and non-grievous sin is based on a doctrine that both accept. But Tertullian adds, in the solution, to the concept of *delicta cotidiana* the idea of *remissibility* to that of *delicta exitiosa* the idea of *irremissibility*. If it is a mere question of adducing remissible sins, why were not those referred to that were discussed as remissible in *Pud. 7*? *Peccata cotidiana* are mentioned for the express purpose of showing that we do not sin to the extent of losing God's sonship. The element of remissibility is felt to be forcedly imposed upon a concept of sin that would, of itself, solve the Scriptural difficulty. The effort of Tertullian to harmonize the system of remissible and irremissible sins with that solution of the Scriptural difficulty which most read-

ily comes forward thrusts itself upon the careful observer by its ill-timed intrusion and ill-fitting substance.

In the objection as formulated from St. John, we find it is true, reference to pardon. In fact the objection itself was brought about by the reflection that Tertullian's doctrine on irremissible sins would make St. John inconsistent. In the answer, then, to that view of the objection, we expect Tertullian to show the value of his doctrine in face of the objection. But Tertullian, while giving the very acceptable distinction between grievous and non-grievous sin, merely repeats his view on remissible and irremissible sin. The *cotidiana* are labeled remissible, the *exitiosa* irremissible. The reason why the *cotidiana* are remissible is Christ's intermediation, the reason why the *exitiosa* are irremissible is the absence of Christ's intermediation. The *cotidiana* evidently are pardonable; if they were not, all men would be lost. God could not be so unmerciful. The intermediation of Christ and the refusal thereof are obviously mere synonymic expressions for remissibility and irremissibility. They do not remove the grounds on which the Psychics, really or supposedly, based their objection.

The objection from St. John would, indeed, remain if the distinction between grievous and non-grievous sin were omitted. Mention of remissibility and irremissibility alone could not have met the Scriptural objection. Tertullian's reference to remissible sin is, therefore, unsatisfactory because he adduces the *cotidiana* only. Other sins that are remissible, but are indeed not among the *cotidiana* (*Pud.* 7), have been omitted, although their mention and, perhaps, a brief explanation of their relation to pardon should have been made by Tertullian, if he were sincerely answering the objections of the Psychics.

The interpretation, then, which we have given of Tertullian's thought in the passage referred to cannot be said to be arbitrary since it takes up the one obvious solution to the Scriptural objection which we could rightly expect of Tertullian even in the heat of his defense. Granted even that the interpretation is arbitrary in so far as it

seeks to make the question of remissibility and irremissibility a secondary matter, granted again, that this question should be, and is primary, there still remains the undeniable distinction between sins, the note of God's sonship attached to the non-grievous, and the note of the loss of God's sonship attached to the grievous sin, at least to the ones here mentioned. It is obvious that Tertullian has not denied the existence of a distinction of sins according to the presence or absence of God's sonship. So much is beyond a doubt from the above discussion.

Perhaps the only difficulty that has the appearance of seriousness to the passing reader is the one based on the passage: *si nulla sit venia istorum* (scl. *delictorum cotidianorum*), *nemini salus competat*.<sup>34</sup> On these words one could construct the objection that even the slightest sins of daily life are in themselves of a grievous nature. If the sins of daily life were not pardonable, all would be lost, that is, the sonship of God would not belong to anyone, which loss of God's sonship is precisely the effect that shows a *delictum* to be of a grievous nature, as we have seen in the preceding investigation of Tertullian's attempt at solving the difficulty from St. John.

Before entering upon a definite reply to this objection concerning the passage *si nulla sit*, etc., we should state, for the sake of a fair understanding of the passage quoted, that the Catholic concept of venial sin can just as easily and correctly be placed on the words in question. The Catholic concept of the nature of venial sin is not at all incompatible with the diction here used by Tertullian. It is true, the diction of Tertullian would not give an accurate view of the nature of venial sin, but nevertheless it is far from condemning, or excluding, the Catholic concept. As a matter of fact, the obvious understanding of the term *venial sin* comprises the element of pardon as the most appropriate interpretation of venial. No one will deny that, at first glance, the distinction of venial and mortal sin seems by reason of terminology inadequate. A more appropriate distinction, if we wish to indicate

34 "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 838.



the nature of sins according to the effect, would be grievous and non-grievous sin, or mortal and non-mortal sin.<sup>35</sup> But since we call a grievous sin mortal from an effect, or, if we view the *mortalitas* as a synonym for the *aversio a Deo*, from a *proprietas peccati mortalis*, so likewise we call non-grievous sin venial from a *proprietas* thereof. *Verum venialis nomen desumptum est ab aliqua proprietate quae consequitur essentiam talis peccati, et non constituit eam. Non enim ideo est tale peccatum quia transitoria tantum poena ei debetur, sed omnino e converso.*<sup>36</sup> We mention this merely to show that the terminology used in speaking of grievous and non-grievous sin is justified by the common view taken of the distinction between those sins. A far-reaching importance attaching to the more apparent than real inadequacy of the terms is out of the question.

Tertullian, then, in speaking of pardon as quite necessarily following sins of daily committal has not made a statement which condemns the Catholic teaching on the nature of venial sin, since amply expounded by St. Thomas.<sup>37</sup> If the diction of Tertullian excluded all other interpretation and meant this only, that the nature of the light sins, i. e., of daily committal, depended upon their pardon and not their pardon upon their nature, then we should admit that Tertullian could be quoted against the Catholic teaching and that Baius would have found support in him for the proposition which Pius V condemned: *Nullum est peccatum ex natura sua veniale, sed omne peccatum meretur poenam aeternam.*<sup>38</sup> We cannot admit however, that just this one interpretation of Tertullian's texts on pardonable sins of daily committal is possible, since various other views of the words of Tertullian suggest themselves spontaneously. Is his view of daily sins one that is based on an analysis of the concept of venial sin *in se*, or is he epitomizing a *reductio ad absurdum*

<sup>35</sup> Billot, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> "De Malo," qu. 7, a. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Denzinger-Bannwart, "Enchiridion Symbolorum," No. 1020, 10th edition, Freiburg i. Br. 1908.

without any further thought of the prevailing concept of light sin?

Thus far we have considered the mere wording of the text. If we consider the context, the matter becomes even more easy to understand. For, as is evident from the principal argument we have constructed on the concept of the sonship of God and the loss thereof, Tertullian has placed sufficient stress on that one thought to carry in its momentum the trend of the whole solution and to override all difficulties. The minor parts of his discussion must be judged, and, if obscure, solved by this controlling thought. The concept of the relation of a sinful soul to the sonship of God remains decisive. It is with that concept that Tertullian tries to harmonize his view on remissibility and irremissibility of sin. How unmindful of the inconsistency with other parts of his division of sin his method of argumentation shows him to be, has been mentioned in other pages. The question of pardon or of its denial does not change the outstanding thought in his lines of reply. The difficulty, therefore, which has been brought concerning the words *si nulla sit*, etc., must, if it cannot be solved in the text itself, find a solution in the accompanying context, which, as seen, favors the Catholic concept of a distinction between mortal and venial sin.

Once we admit, as we believe a fair-minded perusal of the latter half of *Pud.* 19 leads us to do, that the relation of the sinner to the sonship of God is the established solution of St. John's seeming contradiction, the whole context including the words *si nulla sit*, etc., unravels itself with ease. All of us are subject to sin, and that every day. Tertullian mentions the sins we are so liable to commit. And he enumerates the various conditions of life in which we are tempted: *quanta tentamur*. With all these temptations around us, Tertullian implies it would be foolish to suppose that there is no pardon granted for transgressions in conditions so frequently and pressingly misleading to the commission of minor faults.

The following observations are not advanced as an argument but merely as a reflection on Tertullian's attitude toward the distinction between grievous and non-griev-

ous sin. We cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, consider Tertullian so narrow minded as not to have seen the embarrassment he would have to face, if he were understood to say that we are continually gaining and losing the sonship of God, or, which is still less reasonable, that all Christians, being subject to sin daily, are practically always deprived of the sonship of God. But this latter conclusion is the only one we can arrive at if we accept the interpretation of the passage *si nulla sit*, etc., in the sense opposed to the Catholic concept.

Granted that untenable conclusion, then the whole context of Tertullian's solution to the difficulty from St. John becomes one unintelligible paragraph of contradictory statements. He has omitted, as the text shows, all reference to the various kinds of demonstrably grievous sins mentioned in *Pud.* 7 or, for that matter, to the *delicta leviora* mentioned at the end of *Pud.* 18. We do not consider the objection constructed on the words *si nulla sit*, etc., as in any way detrimental to the exposition offered, which gives the Catholic concept of venial sin, principally, because the objection cannot stand the test of contextual investigation.

If we go back further to the broader lines of Tertullian's doctrine as proposed in *Pud.* we find no reason why he should have attacked the doctrine of a distinction of sins, which is based not on the degree but on the nature of the offense *in se*. Tertullian's purpose in writing the *Pud.* was, as has been frequently pointed out, and as is evident from a superficial reading of the work, the defense of his attitude on the irremissibility of certain sins in opposition to the doctrine of the Psychics, which had been summarized in the discipline enunciated in the edict of Callixtus. Tertullian is concerned, not with a thorough understanding of the nature of any offense, in so far as it is merely a transgression, but with those sins, which are in degree of guilt so great, that they are to be considered irremissible. He wants a sharp line drawn between sins, the commission of which makes possible the interpretation of St. John's statement that we all sin,



and sins, the committal of which explains the other statement of St. John that we do not sin.

An interdependent necessary connection between the concepts of *venial* and *mortal* on the one hand and the concepts of remissible and irremissible on the other is not evident from any passage or series of contexts in Tertullian's works. Nor do we find in his argumentation any basis for the assumption that he believed, or even presupposed, an essential coherence between the two series of concepts mentioned. If the contrary could be established we should be obliged to admit that it influenced the ideas in *Pud.* 19, and the objection found in the words *si nulla sit venia*, etc., would have at least a semblance of probability.

The preceding investigation has aimed at viewing the whole passage of *Pud.* 19, dealing with the distinction of sins, from every angle, favorable and unfavorable, to the Catholic contention that tradition upholds the distinction Baius and others have denied.<sup>39</sup> There remains to be seen what light the passage, in several of its details, throws on the interpretation offered.

The lists of sins, both venial and mortal, will profitably occupy our attention, and, while they of themselves cannot, perhaps, establish the nature of the respective sin, that is, in regard to the presence or absence of God's sonship, the consideration of the two lists, in general, and of the sins thereof, separately, will, we believe, confirm the reasonableness of our interpretation.

To begin with general observations on the juxtaposition of the two lists, we find the grievous sins called *contraria istis*, i. e., *delictis cotidianis*. The two classes are therefore opposed to each other. This opposition cannot be said to be merely a matter of degree. The daily sins receive pardon, says Tertullian, the *exitiosa* do not. We all are subject to the *delicta cotidiana*, but one who is born of God, as all Christians are, avoid the *delicta exitiosa*. A possible gradation of grievousness between these two classes seems out of question. Tertullian

39 "Cath. Encycl." Vol. XIV, article on Sin, pp. 4 sqq., O'Neil.

would not be justified in making this contrast so tangible if mortal and venial sin were alike in nature and different in degree only. If it be remembered that this distinction in the nature of sin was offered in solution of St. John's apparent contradiction (that we sin and do not sin) the contrast becomes still more marked.

The consideration of this opposition leads on to the question as to what Tertullian meant by the use of the term *graviora* in this connection. It would seem, from the general trend of Tertullian's argumentation, that his purpose is to mention only two general kinds of sins, and these with the purpose of answering the objection based on St. John's epistle. *Graviora* would then be merely another designation for *exitiosa*. Still it is not excluded that Tertullian wished to mention more than one species under the general heading of *delicta contraria istis*. This acceptance would be quite admissible had he made any reference later on to the term *graviora*. But as we have seen above he insisted on adducing such terms and concepts that would readily lend themselves to his doctrine.

Much stress cannot be placed on a distinction between *graviora* and *exitiosa*, because we have no sufficiently solid basis for the assumption in the text beyond the mere mention of the two terms. The mere use of a modifying term, as *graviora* seems to be of *exitiosa*, would hardly grant us sufficient ground upon which to construct a concept favorable to the interpretation we have placed on Tertullian's distinction between the *delicta* he enumerates as non-destructive and the *delicta* he enumerates as destructive of the sonship of God. Assuming however, and not unreasonably, that Tertullian wished to adduce more than one species of *delicta* of the latter sort, we see therein a confirmation of the statement that Tertullian upheld the Catholic concept of a distinction between mortal and venial sin. For we would have here, in opposition to *delicta cotidiana*, not merely the extreme class, which, according to Tertullian, is ir-

remissible, but also a class of sins, which, while remissible, are still destructive of God's sonship.

From the use of the comparative form *graviora* no serious conclusion should be drawn as to Tertullian's view on the substance of the distinction between mortal and venial sin. The rarer sins are not merely greater in degree than the *delicta cotidiana*. The term *contraria* would be adverse to that meaning of *graviora* and, after all, the term *contraria istis* is decisive here since it fits so well into the concepts of sins, destructive and non-destructive of God's sonship, and controls the solution of the apparent contradiction: that we sin and that we do not sin.

A brief inspection of the daily sins listed by Tertullian in this chapter will, we believe, result favorably to the Catholic concept of venial sin. The daily sins enumerated are: *irasci inique, et ultra solis occasum, aut et manum immittere, aut facile maledicere, aut temere iurare, aut fidem pacti destruere, aut verecundia aut necessitate mentiri*.<sup>40</sup>

Of these sins we can say without much fear of contradiction that two, *facile maledicere, temere iurare*, have reference to defective prerequisite conditions of imputability: imperfect cognition and imperfect volition. *Facile maledicere*, most probably, means the habit of using curse words without forethought. *Temere iurare* can easily be understood to mean the calling upon God as witness without reflecting on the necessity of such an act. From Tertullian's wording we believe we are justified in assuming that to curse with premeditation and to swear without sufficient cause belong to the grievous faults.<sup>41</sup> The qualifying terms *facile* and *temere* seem to indicate that certain sins, that are otherwise grievous,

<sup>40</sup> "Pud." 19, Oehler I, p. 838.

<sup>41</sup> Bingham, "Antiquities," Vol. VI, p. 356. Bingham quotes Tertullian as saying expressly: "that every rash and vain oath did not bring a man under the discipline of public penance, but was reckoned among the sins of daily incursion, for which private repentance was appointed." This cannot be said to be an exact version of the Tertullianic passage in question.



become non-grievous through a defect in advertence or consent. It is not at all improbable that Tertullian, in using the modifying adverbs, had that species of venial sin in mind which we may classify as *veniale ex defectu* though *mortale per se*. Not only is it not improbable that this consideration of non-grievous sin was a matter thoroughly understood by Tertullian and, perhaps by a large number of the faithful, who undoubtedly, in their interpretation of disciplinary regulations, entered upon the finer points, as seems hinted at in the nice choice of *facile* and *temere*, but, in view of Tertullian's comprehensive grasp of the prerequisites of sin, the interpretation given fits very logically into the proposed explanation of the whole context.

Anger seems to be subdivided into three classes: unjust anger, anger beyond sunset, anger to the extent of using physical violence. That there is a just anger is implied by the expression *irasci inique*. Just anger is, of course, not sinful. The enumeration of anger (exclusive of the sense of revenge) among the light sins by Tertullian is in accord with the traditional view. Our moral theology text books teach the same. Tertullian cannot be accused of a rigoristic view in his explanation of the sinfulness of anger since in his opinion even striking another in anger is but a small sin. In the matter of anger, it is not a question of the lack of advertence and consent as is the case of *facile maledicere* and *temere iurare*. It might be argued that the use of physical violence in a fit of anger frequently occurs without full advertence and deliberate consent, and that, hence, Tertullian probably counts anger among the grievous faults as such, but admits that the lack of prerequisites reduce it to a non-grievous fault. Abstracting from the possibility that Tertullian, in the use of the expression *manum immittere* could easily have included those instances in which physical violence in anger occurs with full deliberation and consent, we might call attention to the inconsistency implied by the supposition that anger could ordinarily continue *ultra solis occasum* without adver-

tence and consent. And Tertullian mentions this species of anger as belonging to the daily faults. Moreover Tertullian mentions, as the first of the daily faults and the first of the various species of anger, *inique irasci*. The modifying term *inique* does not refer to advertence or consent, as do the other modifiers considered above, namely, *facile* and *temere*. *Inique irasci* can have no other meaning, apparently, than that of sinful anger.<sup>42</sup> If, therefore, anger is sinful, it is but one of the daily faults, which do not destroy the sonship of God. We have, then, in Tertullian's mention of anger, an example of a non-grievous sin which is such in its very nature. Catholic teaching concerning sins that are venial *ex natura sua* finds, we believe, in the analysis of this term a very probable argument in its favor.

"White" lies, *verecundia aut necessitate mentiri*, are among the daily sins. Shame or necessity do not of themselves exclude deliberation and full consent. That Tertullian is not thinking of importantly consequential falsehoods seems evident from the term "daily". Hence, small but deliberate lies are, to all appearance, the sins he has reference to in the term *verecundia aut necessitate mentiri*. This consideration, again, would favor the Catholic doctrine concerning the existence of sins that are venial *ex natura sua*.

The enumeration of *fidem pacti destruere* among the light sins causes, perhaps, some surprise.<sup>43</sup> We are not able to state precisely what Tertullian meant by that expression. The ANF. translation "forfeiting the plighted word" comes quite close to what we would be inclined to consider as the most probable meaning. From the very supposition that among Christians this sin is of daily occurrence, and that it is on a par with "white" lies, we do not believe that the term comprehends more than neglecting inconsequential promises. The surprise, which its enumeration among daily sins causes, does not

<sup>42</sup> "Orat." II, Oehler I, p. 565. Si irascenrum est, non ultra solis receptum, ut Apostolus admonet.

<sup>43</sup> Noeldechen, "Tertullian," p. 493.

delete it from the list nor obscure the fact that again there is no question of imperfect prerequisites. *Fidem pacti destruere* must be considered non-grievous, as are the other daily sins enumerated before and after it, a sin that is non-grievous in its very nature.

What sins were considered mortal (in Catholic sense) in the day of Tertullian is a matter that cannot be definitely stated at the present stage of investigation. Tertullian himself most probably considered all sins except the *cotidiana* as destructive of God's sonship, even the *leviora* of *Pud.* 18. Making due allowance for the rigorism of Tertullian's works we would deduce from them that the following sins were most probably considered grievous by the faithful: Murder,<sup>44</sup> idolatry, deed-sins of the flesh, blasphemy, apostasy, denial of faith, false or unnecessary deliberate oaths. We are not sure from Tertullian that we may enumerate evil thoughts and desires to the preceding. There are no passages in his works that would give us enough basis to form even a general estimate as to what he considered grievously wrong in commutative justice. A passage in *Apol.* 39 will perhaps explain why we find little or no discussion of theft or robbery:<sup>45</sup> *Itaque qui animo animaque miscemur, nihil de rei communicatione dubitamus. Omnia indiscreta sunt apud nos praeter uxores.*

Indications as to the degree of malice of other sins are so general that speculation as to what other sins were considered mortal by the faithful is fruitless at present.

We might add that, in speaking of sin and assigning it a degree of gravity, Tertullian undoubtedly understands the individual act, not a series of acts. This is evident not only from his general view on Christian perfection but also from the many passages in which *delictum* is used in preference to a term indicative of evil habit.

44 D'Alès, "La Thèol. de Tert.," p. 277: Il semble permettre aux médecins l'embryotomie.—"Anim." 25: In ipso adhuc utero infans trucidatur necessaria crudelitate....infanticidii officio.

45 Oehler I, p. 262. Cf. "Adv. Marc." II, 20; IV, 24.



## CHAPTER XV.

## SUMMARY.

A comparison between the passages on grievous sin in the early writings and the treatises on the same subject in the age of the Theologians will show a difference in terminology, but not in concept. The treatises teach that mortal sin is a transgression of divine law in serious matter, that the transgression, to be morally imputable, must be conscious and voluntary, implying a separation from God, hence, a conscious and voluntary preference of the created to the Creator. In a person who has been sanctified by divine grace, the transgression means the loss of this gift, the non-participation of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the loss of the sonship of God. It entails, furthermore, unless reconciliation takes place, the loss of eternal life. These conditions, elements, and effects of grievous sin are found substantially in the early documents. As we have seen in the study of the passages from the works of Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian, moral cognition and moral volition are explained and defended *ex professo*. Their writings teach that grievous sin is impossible where these prerequisites are wanting. Even in so early a document as the *Epistle of Barnabas* we find knowledge mentioned explicitly, and consent obviously implied, as prerequisites of imputability.

The malice of mortal sin, the separation from God, the ultimate end of man, is well given in the *Shepherd's* adaptation of the Scriptural expression "departure from the living God." Various writings describe the effects of this malice as non-participation of the Spirit of God, privation of "the hope of life", immediate death of the soul, rejection by God, eventually the loss of life eternal.

The distinction between the frequent and the single act of sin is founded, we believe, on sufficient evidence. Expressions and passages, have been adduced which, we

believe, will solve the doubt as to whether the early Christians, by grievous sin, meant the individual transgression or the habit, the frequent repetition of disregard for divine law.

The division of sins into those of thought, word, and deed is evident from many passages. Irenaeus is the first to mention the three species explicitly.

The sins mentioned in the *Didache* as grievous seem to have been considered such in all the subsequent documents. Others were added to the list in the course of time, but more by way of comprehensiveness than by way of an attempt at a reconstructed enumeration. Idolatry, heresy, apostasy, murder, sins of impurity, theft, robbery, false witnessing, these transgressions of the divine law were consistently considered grievous. A satisfactory comparison of the variations or differences in enumeration in the various documents can be attempted only after the terms of morality in Scripture and their definite value in the early writings are established.

In our opinion the terms *mortal* and *capital* were not standardized expressions, nor can it be demonstrated from Tertullian's work that they were used synonymously.

There seems to be conclusive proof that a distinction was made between mortal and venial sin even in the Pre-Tertullianic period. Passages of the *Didache* strongly support this contention.

We are satisfied that Tertullian had a precise concept of the *distinction* between *mortal* and *venial sin*. His solution of the Scriptural assertions that we do sin and do not sin, by adducing the *peccata cotidiana* as non-destructive of God's sonship and the *peccata exitiosa* as destructive thereof, discloses his mind on this question.

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DEUS LUX MEA

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THESES

QUAS

AD DOCTORATUS GRADUM

IN

SACRA THEOLOGIA

APUD UNIVERSITATEM CATHOLICAM AMERICAE

CONSEQUENDUM

PUBLICICE PROPUGNABIT

HUBERTUS LUDOVICUS MOTRY, S. T. L.,

SACERDOS DIOECESIS ALBANENSIS

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HORA IX A. M. DIE I IUNII A. D. MCMXX

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No. 15

## THESES.

## I.

A well defined concept of the nature and effects of grievous sin existed in early Christianity.

## II.

The prerequisite conditions of imputability, namely, moral cognition and moral volition, were defended *ex professo*.

## III.

The explicit division of sins into those of thought, word and deed dates back to St. Irenaeus.

## IV.

Sins mentioned in the Didache as grievous were consistently considered such in subsequent documents.

## V.

There is not sufficient evidence to show that "mortal" and "capital" were standardized theological terms at the time of Tertullian.

## VI.

The various passages of his works in which the terms "mortal" and "capital" occur do not support the contention that these terms were synonymous.

## VII.

The Tertullianic term "mortal sin" represented the following conceptual content: the restriction of the power of remitting such sin to God alone and a gravity of offense that took the offenders out of the jurisdiction and the communion of the Church for life.

## VIII.

The Didache very probably implies a distinction between grievous and non-grievous transgression.

## IX.

In Tertullian's works we find conclusive proof that there existed in his time a precise concept of the distinction between mortal and venial sin.

## X.

Even the distinction between "peccata venialia ex

genere suo" and "peccata venialia ex imperfectione actus" is sufficiently outlined by Tertullian.

#### XI.

Ad rationem peccati concurrunt substantia actus et defectus rectitudinis.

#### XII.

Privatio debitae rectitudinis actui morali inest, in quantum caret commensuratione ad regulam legis aeternae der dictamen conscientiae voluntati applicatam.

#### XIII.

Malum morale nec esse nec concipi potest abstractione facta a lege Dei et fine quem respicit lex divina.

#### XIV.

Peccatum mortale ex parte substantiae actus convenienter definitur: dictum vel factum vel concupitum contra legem aeternam. Ex parte vero defectus, aversio a Deo, fine ultimo, per voluntariam conversionem ad bonum commutabile.

#### XV.

Peccatum veniale est actio moraliter mala quae non tollit principium ordinis ad Deum, finem ultimum.

#### XVI.

Variae normae (S. Thomae, Scoti, Vasquezii) ad stabiliendam specificam distinctionem peccatorum reipsa ab invicem non differunt.

#### XVII.

Proximo malum temporale desiderare ob bonum finem non est contra caritatem.

#### XVIII.

Haud licitum est fidelibus quovis modo active assistere seu partem habere in sacris acatholicorum.

#### XIX.

Illicitum est sponte vocare ministrum haereticum, ut ipse moribundo solatia religionis praebeat.

#### XX.

Qui libere iurat se aliquid facturum, peculiari religionis obligatione tenetur implendi quod iureiurando firmaverit.



## XXI.

Nunquam licet propria auctoritate se ipsum directe occidere.

## XXII.

Non licet aggressorem famae occidere.

## XXIII.

There exists a moral obligation to distribute the greater part of superfluous goods or income.

## XXIV.

Testis, qui legitime interrogatus celat veritatem sed falsum non dicit, probabiliter ad restitutionem non teneatur.

## XXV.

Secretum commissum strictius obligat quam secretum naturale, atque etiam secretum promissum.

## XXVI.

Non in unanimitate explicationum, sed potius in continua attestationum catena, consistit traditio catholica; ac proinde a veritate aberrant ii qui dogmata catholica ab explicationibus theologicis eorundem non sedulo discreverint.

## XXVII.

Reiicienda est sententia iuxta quam "dogmata quae Ecclesia perhibet tanquam revelata, non sunt veritates a caelo delapsae, sed sunt interpretatio quaedam factorum religiosorum, quam humana mens laborioso conatu sibi comparavit." Ex decreto Lamentabili, No. 22.

## XXVIII.

Quod christianae religionis dogmata aut ex philosophorum antiquorum placitis deprompta fuerint, aut ad instar germinis biologici profecerint, historia teste, sustineri nequit.

## XXIX.

Non in concupiscentia, sed in privatione vitae supernaturalis sita est peccati originalis essentia.

## XXX.

Conceptus naturae purae a theologis exaratus, licet speculationi potius quam historiae innitatur, medium aptum praebet ad doctrinam peccati originalis comparative intelligendam.

## XXXI.

Spiritus Sancti inhabitatio a gratia sanctificante distinguitur, quamvis nunquam separetur.

## XXXII.

Propter hanc novam vitam animae inhaerentem, non solum filii Dei nominamur, sed et revera sumus.

## XXXIII.

Continuam esse gratiam cum vita nostra naturali, licet ab eadem distinctam, ex concreto examine axiomatis, quod scilicet "gratia non tollit, sed perficit naturam," luculenter demonstrari posse asserimus.

## XXXIV.

In iis quae Sanctus Thomas contra Lombardum de natura gratiae disserentem urgebat, inveniuntur principia non solum ad exortas controversias, sed ad futuras etiam dirimendas apta, quasi ipse praesagiens has quoque prae oculis habuisset.

## XXXV.

Admittendam esse gratiam ab actuali distinctam per modum doni permanentis, quod habeat rationem qualitatis et habitus, non solum traditionis documentis, sed et argumentis Sancti Thomae apertissime constat.

## XXXVI.

Prohibentur clerici per se vel per alios negotiationem aut mercaturam exercere sive in propriam sive in aliorum utilitatem. Canon 142.

## XXXVII.

Si, non obstante praescripto can. 520, 521, aliqua religiosa, ad suae conscientiae tranquillitatem, confessarium adeat, ab Ordinario loci pro mulieribus approbatum, confessio in qualibet ecclesia vel oratorio etiam semi-publico peracta, valida et licita est, revocato quolibet contrario privilegio; neque Antistita id prohibere potest aut de ea re inquirere, ne indirecte quidem; et religiosae nihil Antistitae referre tenentur. Canon 522.

## XXXVIII.

Religiosae omnes, cum graviter aegrotant, licet mortis periculum absit, quemlibet sacerdotem ad mulierum confessiones excipiendas approbatum, etsi non destinatum

religiosis, arcessere possunt eique, perdurante gravi infirmitate, quoties voluerint, confiteri, nec Antistita potest eas sive directe sive indirecte prohibere. Canon 523.

## XXXIX.

Unicum peccatum ratione sui reservatum Sanctae Sedi est falsa delatio, qua sacerdos innocens accusatur de crimine sollicitationis apud iudices ecclesiasticos. Canon 894.

## XL.

Scientia aut opinio nullitatis matrimonii consensum matrimonialem neccessario non excludit. Canon 1085.

## XLI.

Sacra Scriptura non solum in rebus ad fidem per se spectantibus, sed in omnibus et singulis partibus divinitus inspirata est.

## XLII.

Nullum inter protocanonicos et deuterocanonicos libros discrimen ostendunt epistolae S. Clementis Romani atque Pastor Hermae.

## XLIII.

The chronological data of the Old Testament are not at variance with the findings of prehistoric archaeology in regard to the first appearance of man on the earth.

## XLIV.

An examination of the first Gospel shows that the author was a Christian of Jewish origin, and that he wrote his Gospel for readers who were converted from Judaism.

## XLV.

The education of St. Paul before his conversion fitted him providentially for his mission of spreading the universal gospel.

## XLVI.

The miraculous element in the Gospels is so intimately woven into the narrative that one may not consistently reject the miracles as spurious and accept the sayings of Jesus as authentic.

## XLVII.

The wonderful cures wrought by Jesus defy all at-



tempts to explain them on the basis of hypnotism or mind-cures.

#### XLVIII.

St. Paul is a most powerful witness to the reality of Christ's bodily resurrection.

#### XLIX.

The transcendent excellence of Jesus' moral and religious teaching points to the truth of His claim to be divine.

#### L.

The teaching of Jesus in regard to man's duties to God runs directly counter to the principles of religious indifference.

#### LI.

Certum videtur omnia sacramenta a Christo immediate esse instituta.

#### LII.

Ad validitatem sacramenti requiritur et sufficit in ministro intentio virtualis.

#### LIII.

Sacramentorum valor non pendet a sanctitate vel fide ministri.

#### LIV.

Conversio totius substantiae panis in substantiam corporis Christi Domini nostri et totius substantiae vini in substantiam sanguinis eius convenienter et proprie a sancta catholica ecclesia transsubstantiatio est appellata.

#### LV.

Sacramentum poenitentiae lapsis post baptismum ad salutem est necessarium ut nondum regeneratis ipse baptismus.

#### LVI.

A comparative study of Tertullian's *De Paenitentia* and *De Pudicitia* justifies the conclusion that the edict of Callixtus is not to be considered as having brought about an innovation in the early penitential practice.

#### LVII.

The reference to one class of serious sin only in the

edict of Callixtus finds a plausible explanation in the condition of the Church at the time the edict was issued.

## LVIII.

The Galileo affair cannot be adduced as evidence of the Church's opposition to true science.

## LIX.

The action of Henry VIII in suppressing the English monasteries, dictated as it was by cupidity, was injurious to the best interests of the kingdom.

## LX.

England's breach with the Papacy was due to the divorce of Henry VIII rather than to irritation engendered by foreign domination.

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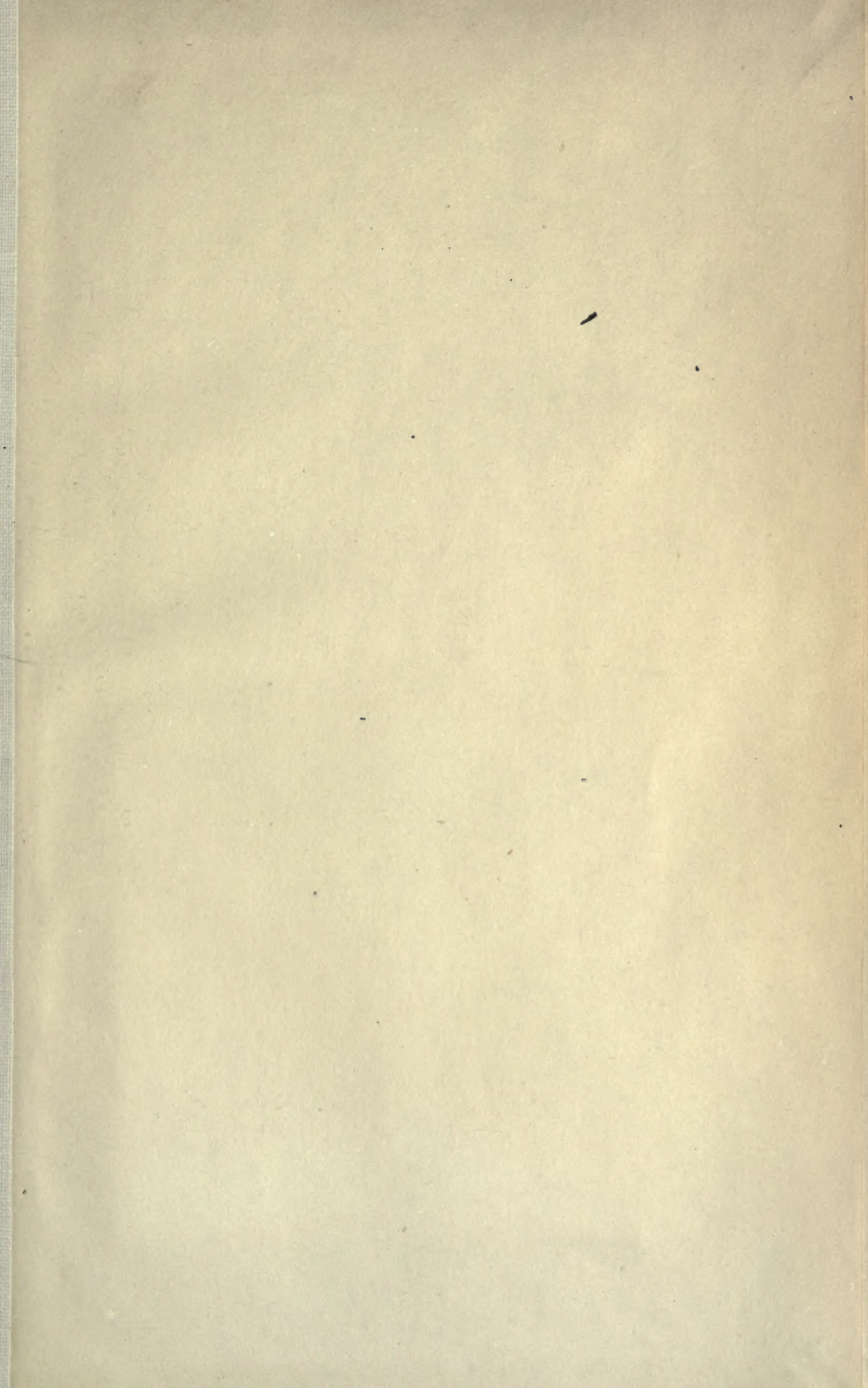
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